OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER

A TRIBUTE TO LLAMASOFT

JEFF MINTER REFLECTS ON HIS EPIC, ECLECTIC BACK CATALOGUE

THE MAKING OF FABLE

PETER MOLYNEUX RETURNS TO ALBION TO DISCUSS ITS ORIGINS

SPELLBOUND

CELEBRATING MAGIC KNIGHT'S BEWITCHING QUEST

THE 100 GREATEST RETRO GAMES

THE MAKING OF DAXTER

HOW READY AT DAWN CREATED ITS SLICK PSP PLATFORMER

THE ULTIMATE COUNTDOWN, CHOSEN BY RG, YOU & CLASSIC GAME CREATORS

RETRO GAMER'S LOST ISSUE

FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED TO THE MISSING 19TH EDITION

RICHARD JACQUES

THE LEGENDARY MUSICIAN ON SONIC R, MSR AND MORE

FUTURE

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ULTIMATE GUIDE: COUNTER-STRIKE

CO-CREATOR MINH LE REVISITS THE ICONIC SHOOTER

TEKKEN 8 REVIEWED

IS NAMCO'S FIGHTER STILL KING OF THE IRON FIST?

CONGRATULATIONS FOR 20 YEARS, RETRO GAMER
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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER?

DARRAN JONES

Issue 82's Mario advent calendar. It's probably the most creative thing I've ever birthed from my tired old brain.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Ender Lilies: Quietus Of The Knights*
Favourite game of all time: *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast*

TIM EMPEY

Issue 33's *Street Fighter III* cover, because I remember being in the office way back then and Darran working on that issue, just after I destroyed his Hugo with Yun.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go
Currently playing: *Dead Island 2*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

Issue 200 feels like cheating, so I'll say issue 137 – not only does it have a cool cover and great features, but writing about Pepsi Man gained me a long-term friend.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *Radiant Silvergun*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

236. I love the Ryu pixel-art cover along with the accompanying subs cover.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding: *Total War: Rome Remastered – RTR: Imperium Surrectum*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now

ANDREW FISHER

Working on issue 238's feature on 40 Years Of The C64 with Paul Drury.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: *Megacopter: Blades of the Goddess*
Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*

PAUL DRURY

Issue 100. It felt like such a milestone. Plus I'd interviewed the legendary Ralph Baer for it and it came with the reprint of issue 1, which made it extra special.
Expertise: Light synths
Currently playing: *The Legend Of Steel Empire*
Favourite game of all time: *Sheep In Space*

DAVID CROOKES

Issue 19: following fears **Retro Gamer** had ended after a good run under Live Publishing, saviour Imagine stepped in. We haven't looked back since (well, we have but, you know…)
Expertise: Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, *Dizzy* and Sony's PlayStation 2 (but is it actually retro? Debate!)
Currently playing: *Okami*
Favourite game of all time: *Broken Sword*

RORY MILNE

I have a soft spot for the first issue I read – the one with the *Ant Attack* cover. Seeing it always reminds me of how excited I was to find a mag about old games.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Forza Horizon*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*

MARTYN CARROLL

The first one. Probably the poorest issue, content-wise, but it had to start somewhere, and it was the start of something special.
Expertise: Sinclair stuff
Currently playing: *Resident Evil 6*
Favourite game of all time: *Jet Set Willy*

LOADING...

've always known that readers love Retro Gamer. I saw it when the magazine first launched while working on *games™*. I also remember reading forums when Live Publishing shut down, and seeing the discussions about readers banding together to buy **RG**'s rights so the mag could keep going. Readers are genuinely passionate about the magazine and it's an honour to be a part of it.

We're now 20 years and 257 issues down the line and that love for the magazine is as strong as ever. We've been on quite the journey these past two decades and the current version of **RG** is very different to what Martyn and his team first launched in 2004, but we're still here, we're still creating amazing features and we're still hungry to share even more of them with you. And let's be honest, we're really here because you love the magazine as much as we do.

So what have we done to celebrate such a big milestone? Well, we've put together a superb array of features, created a gorgeous double-sided poster for you (with one side highlighting the past 256 covers of the mag) and dredged our collective memories to craft a 32-page book about the creation of the magazine you enjoy so much.

So here's to 20 years of **Retro Gamer**, and a big thanks to everyone that's made that happen. We hope you enjoy many more years with us.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

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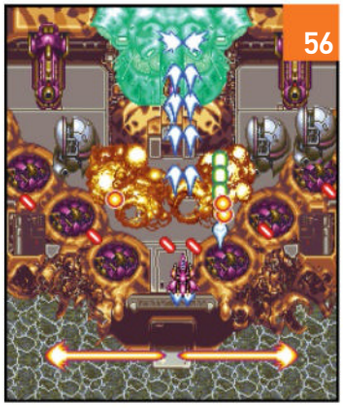

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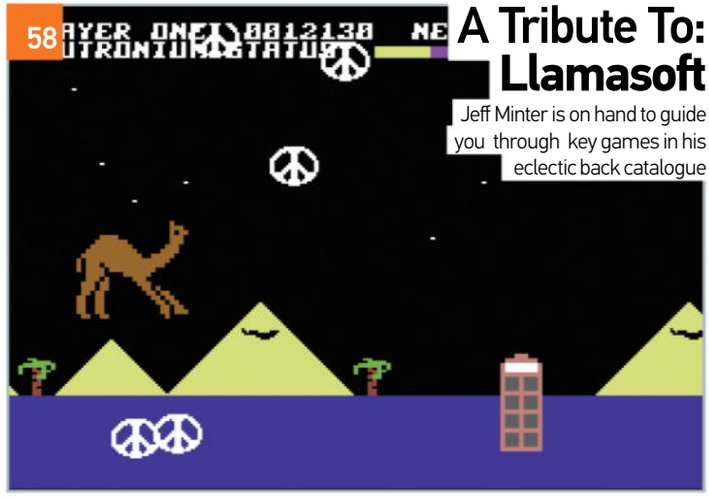
The 100 Greatest Retro Games

It's a real team effort as we sort through the games chosen by **RG**'s staff, developers and **Retro Gamer** readers



A Tribute To: Llamasoft

Jeff Minter is on hand to guide you through key games in his eclectic back catalogue

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Peter Molyneux and John McCormack revisit Albion to discuss their epic adventure

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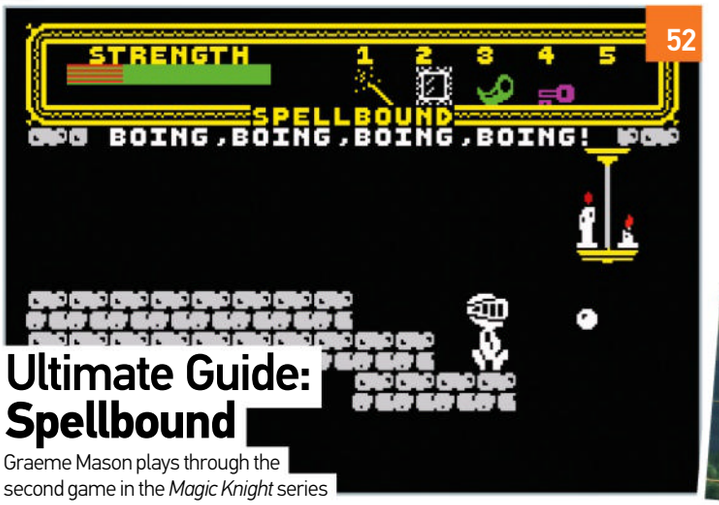

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Nick reaches the end of another game for you

» [PC] Tag co-created the RPG *Legend* with Peter James.

» [PC] Tag helped start the *Total War* series with *Shogun*.

A TRIBUTE TO ROSS GOODLEY AND ANTHONY TAGLIONE

Paying respects to two classic gaming developers

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Nick's journey through time continues, but will he find some games to enjoy?

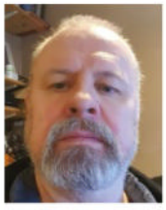
Retro-gaming fans were dealt a double blow in December 2023, when two well-respected UK game developers passed away. Anthony Taglione and Ross Goodley both crafted their love and skill for games in the early Eighties and went on to write some classic 8-bit and 16-bit titles.

Anthony Taglione was known as Tag to his close friends and work colleagues and is probably best remembered for the 16-bit RPGs *Bloodwych* and *Legend*, and later for kick-starting the *Total War* series on the PC for Creative Assembly. However, his catalogue of titles can be traced back to the very early Eighties and includes some memorable early games and conversions of well-known 8-bit games for the ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64 for Incentive and Beyond Software. He was extremely talented and went into every project with gusto, often with a dry sense of humour and a twinkle in his eye. He was also quite happy to have a good argument if the need arose.

» [Saturn] Ross chipped in on the development of *FIFA 97*.

Anthony's brother Philip was also a very astute games developer, writing several games including the ZX Spectrum conversion of *Moon Cresta* and Z80 versions of *Bloodwych* for the ZX Spectrum and Amstrad CPC, before working on PlayStation titles and mobile games. He passed away in the summer of 2019. A full tribute to Anthony will be included alongside his final interview, as part of The Making of *Alpha Storm* article appearing in the next issue.

Ross Goodley's first professional games were all written for the BBC Micro and were published by Sheffield-based Alligata Software in the early Eighties. After he wrote a conversion of Antony Crowther's Commodore 64 game *Blagger*, he created *Dambusters*, *Web Runner*, and *Neanderthal Man* in quick succession. A handful of budget arcade games for another Sheffield-based publisher called Budgie followed soon afterwards, concentrating on games for the new Z80-based MSX and Amstrad CPC platforms.



» Ross Goodley worked on a number of games during the Eighties like *Dambusters* and later enjoyed a long career at Sumo Digital.

» Anthony 'Tag' Taglione made some truly memorable games for the 8-bit and 16-bit systems including the excellent *Bloodwych*.

Ross continued his working association with Antony on various games after their stints with Alligata and Budgie in Sheffield were over, including the fiendish puzzler *Bombuzal* for Mirrorsoft, collaborating with industry stalwart David Bishop. Antony wrote the Commodore version, and Ross handled the ST and Amiga versions. Ross went solo as The Wyvern for his next

» [Amstrad CPC] Ross converted Tony Crowther's *Challenge Of The Gobots*.

> "I've enjoyed Ross' company for many years and will miss him dearly"
> **ANTONY CROWTHER**

project, creating the 3D arcade and space strategy title *Gravity*, also published by Mirrorsoft under the Image Works label in 1990. His love of classic science fiction and his fascination with physics and science came to the fore in that game, and with his intended sequel. The follow-up was called *Drop Soldier*, developed for the ST and Amiga. Unfortunately, it was destined to remain unfinished after Mirrorsoft fell into administration at the end of 1991.

Despite the setback of losing his publisher, Ross was soon back in the development saddle, working with Antony Crowther once again as The Byte Engineers on Antony's *Captive 2: Liberation* sequel for the Amiga and CD32, a game that still stands out to this day as one of the best titles available for Commodore's short-lived CD-based console.

With solo development projects becoming increasingly difficult in a rapidly changing industry, Ross felt obliged to move into team development in the mid-Nineties for a handful of companies including Team17, Blade Interactive, and Gamesauce, working on titles for the Saturn, Game Boy Advance, PlayStation 2, and PSP. He had a six-year stint working outside of games, developing firmware and other embedded software for various hardware projects before returning to the fold when joining Sumo Digital in 2014, where he remained for the rest of his career.

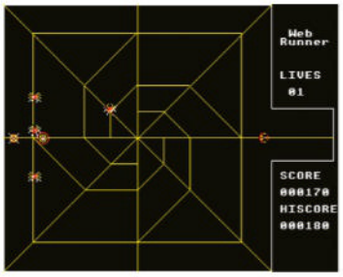
"It was a shock to hear that Ross passed just before Christmas," says Antony. "I've worked with him for many years, most recently on a project together at Sumo. Long before *Captive 2* on the Amiga, we worked together at Alligata back in the Eighties, where Ross tolerated me playing Pink Floyd's *The Wall* over and over again in the office. That's when I used to have nights out to enjoy watching him act in a play. Ross converted many of my games from the Commodore 64 to the Amstrad, while I was still working on the Commodore version. I've enjoyed Ross' company for many years and will miss him dearly."

For gamers, Ross leaves behind an impressive legacy of titles to enjoy on classic hardware. He started out when the industry was brand-new, and quickly established himself as a programmer and designer of some considerable talent. There aren't too many people who can lay claim to such a diverse range of titles on their CV, from TV cartoon licence *Challenge Of The Gobots*, hardcore 3D sci-fi space opera strategy game *Gravity*, 3D RPG *Liberation: Captive 2*, through *G-Surfers* to the official *Little Britain* videogame, with some *FIFA '97* and a couple of game industry BAFTA winning titles thrown in for good measure. Our thoughts go out to the friends and family of both men.

» [Amiga A1200] Ross and Tony Crowther's amazing sequel to *Captive*, called *Liberation*.

» [BBC Micro] *Dambusters* was an early Ross game inspired by early arcade coin-op games.

» [Amiga] *Gravity* was Ross's 3D sci-fi strategy epic.



» [BBC Micro] *Web Runner* was another early Alligata release created by Ross.

» [PlayStation 2] Ross coded the pilot AI for Blade Interactive's *G-Surfers*.

EASY FREEZY

If you're a fan of the Commodore 64 make sure you look out for the excellent *FREEZE64*. Created by Vinny Mainolfi, the popular fanzine has sold over 35,000 copies and is, rather appropriately, on its 64th issue. We know how difficult it is creating a magazine full time, so can only imagine how tricky it is when you're creating something as a labour of love. Congratulations to Vinny and everyone else that makes *FREEZE64* such a great read.

AERO ON EVERCADE

Blaze Entertainment has announced that *Sunsoft Collection 2* will arrive by the end of April. It features seven games, including *Aero The Acro-Bat 2*, *Blaster Master: Enemy Below*, *Ufouria: The Saga*, *Daze Before Christmas*, *Zero The Kamikaze Squirrel*, *Pri Pri Primitive Princess!* and *Galaxy Fight: Universal Warriors*. While not all the included games are stone-cold classics, many are now very expensive to acquire, making this an enticing cart to seek out.

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

Photo credit: youtube.com/@RMCRetro

Falling, yes I am falling

I am falling down the rabbit hole of watching people on YouTube recapping consoles and old computers, cleaning their cases with toothbrushes, retro brighting yellowing old machine carcasses and overall having a lot of fun bringing these beasts back to life. If I'm honest, I don't even know what recapping is and the one time I tried to solder something I burnt the thing I was working on and damaged my finger quite badly.

These videos are SO SLOOOOOW. They take ages to get anywhere and they're presented in a really gentle way. They run contrary to how my brain works. I am a late diagnosis ADHDer. My head can fire off in a million directions all at once. I am fuelled entirely by caffeine and dopamine hits. If something isn't exciting and isn't dinging my bell, I'm not interested. That in part explains why I am drawn to faster games. *WipEout* for me ticks every box – fast, noisy, relentless and colourful.

So why am I currently so obsessed with watching dudes fix 25-year-old Japanese PCs that literally no one has ever heard of?

Do you remember when ASMR was big? Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response. It's basically kids whispering into microphones and gently scrunching newspaper. Some people say they get tingles down their neck and their eyes roll back in their head, kind of like when you're stroking exactly the right spot on a cat, and they get lost in themselves. I've had mixed luck with ASMR. The tingles come every now and then, but it isn't consistent.

While I certainly don't get tingles watching someone like Ctrl-Alt-Rees fixing an old Atari C-240 Video Music (Google it, it is an absolutely insane machine) my eyes do start rolling around and I find myself entering an unusual state of Zen. I say unusual because my neurodiversity means Idiot FM is playing full blast almost 24 hours a day in my head. Yet these methodical and precise videos seem to somehow turn the volume down, my alpha waves reduce and I am… calm. Calm.

I actually have no idea what alpha waves are, I may have made it up. Hey, this is **Retro Gamer** not *The Lancet*. This isn't my thesis, just the ramblings of some old bloke who used to be on the telly. Deal with it.

This feeling of serenity is new for me, and I find it very addictive. So once Rees has done his thing, I jump onto the RMCretro channel to watch Neil scrubbing an FM Towns Marty in washing up liquid before heading off to discover some other machine I have never heard of.

However, I can't live like this forever. Even the cat who's been lying there having her tummy rubbed for 20 minutes has to get up and climb a tree or chase a mouse. My equivalent of that is going to some American retro YouTubers and listening to them shouting before they start throwing shade at each other and calling out other American YouTubers for being frauds or con men or just bad at their job. Swings and indeed, roundabouts. *

> "The one time I tried to solder something I burnt the thing I was working on and damaged my finger"

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:
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HAPPY 20th ANNIVERSARY retro GAMER
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PC GAMER MOST WANTED 2023
STEAM
PS5
GAME PASS
XBOX SERIES X|S
The Chinese Room
SECRET MODE

Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Gaming guinea pigs

I've been playing a lot of old games recently – more than usual – due to capturing game footage for my YouTube channel (new series *Digi Level 2* is out now… excuse the plug). My exploration isn't limited to the usual paddocks, but ventures down the lesser-travelled paths of gaming history.

It's proving to be a challenge because so many classic games, especially the home-computer games of the Eighties, are borderline unplayable. Yes, this might be considered heresy in this magazine, but it's the truth. We need to admit it to ourselves. Many games were punching so high above their weight that they broke their arms.

If you're using emulation, the experience is somewhat improved – you can use controllers or keyboard layouts that aren't completely illogical. However, if you're sticking with the original control scheme, then nine times out of ten, you're screwed.

Why did so many classic Spectrum games, to cite one example, place all the controls on the same line of the keyboard; up, down, left, right, fire, collect? It's beyond counterintuitive; it's profoundly fiddly, and it seems no one ever stopped to consider whether a better layout might've been slightly less insane.

Furthermore, many Spectrum games almost collapsed under their own complexity. Anything beyond the simplest arcade-style action games required a PhD in Advanced Baffling Strategy, or some sort of training course to memorise esoteric menu systems.

It's no wonder games like *Manic Miner* and *Jetpac* were so beloved – because they kept things relatively simple, pure, and didn't over-stress the hardware to the point of implosion.

Let's be honest, *Knight Lore* was a classic, but its acclaim had very little to do with the gameplay, which would regularly grind to a halt whenever too much was happening on the screen, and was so difficult that only the most stubborn and masochistic players could endure the pain.

And it's not just the action games; I've also been playing a few text adventures. These were my games of choice back in the day, and now I have no idea why. Those early Spectrum adventures were so limited in vocabulary that interacting with them felt like yelling at a fridge.

"YOU CAN'T DO THAT HERE."
"WHY NOT?! EXAMINE THE KEY."
"YOU DO NOT HAVE THE KEY."
"GET KEY."
"I DON'T SEE THE KEY."
"I HATE YOU."
"I DON'T UNDERSTAND."

And so on ad infinitum, only with more swearing. Even advancing a generation to play some of Cinemaware's Amiga games, which are clearly a step forward, I found the mouse control seemed to work against the player, and the logic structure was so rigid and inflexible that I wanted to hit myself in the face.

Yet, in spite of it all, I still love these games. I love their ambition. I love seeing how the creators were figuring things out as they went along. This sort of freewheeling creativity has been mostly lost in today's big games.

They were the scientists, and we were the guinea pigs. We suffered through *Jack The Nipper*, *Shadowfire*, and the insane control system for *Slaine The Celtic Barbarian*, so that future generations wouldn't have to. *

"The logic structure was so rigid and inflexible that I wanted to hit myself in the face"

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:
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How STRANGE!
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INFERNO

SECRET MODE

» Some art from Chilean illustrator Pepegraphix, showing a variety of Octopus-compatible consoles.

TR Fight Stick

Going behind the scenes of a new multiformat arcade stick

» This is the finalised design of the Octopus, revised from the prototype you may have seen online.

Following a successful crowdfunding campaign that has raised over £110,000, TR Fight Stick is preparing to launch the Octopus – a multiformat arcade stick supporting Dreamcast, Neo Geo, Xbox, NES, SNES, PlayStation consoles, Switch, PC and more. Yunus Emre Sogukkanli and Dan Morelle tell us about how the company first formed and its plans for the future.

How did TR Fight Stick first get started?

Yunus: My main job is actually director and stunt coordinator, and arcade games were my hobby when I was a kid, and I was creating some wooden stuff for myself because in Turkey there are no original arcade machines. Then there is a community on the internet, and talking with them everybody asked me, "Can you create these things and sell them to us?" In those days, I just told people, "I really don't have enough time, and wood is not good for mass production." I think in 2018 I decided, "Maybe I can create some things with metal," because it's OK for mass production. Then I created my first arcade stick – I just created the model, I didn't know anything about designing or manufacturing. One of my friends was the mechanical engineer.

Dan: Yunus is actually being very modest here. First of all, he was a stunt director on *Skyfall*, James Bond, and when it comes to his industrial design, electronics and PCB engineering skills, he's completely self-taught.

What kind of products did you make after that?

Yunus: The second product was a CPS-3 case – nowadays everybody just gets them in their home, and they're very rare and unique PCBs so they have to protect them. One of my biggest challenges was the replica Mini Cute arcade cabinet. When I told the community, most people told me, "OK, you're creating small boxes – that's good, but this is a different area, you cannot make it." Then I tell myself, "If you tell me I cannot make it, I should force myself." That was not a commercial project, I just made it to prove myself to the community.

» Yunus (left) on the set of the action-packed *What's In The Case?* trailer.

» Octopus artwork is designed to be easily swapped via the Octoplate system.

» Brook Gaming, represented here by their chameleon, joined the Octopus project early on.

» Yunus (nearer to the camera) and Dan enjoy *Tetris: The Grand Master 2 Plus*.

> "Holy shit, we're gonna have to throw Yunus against the wall to promote the fight stick"
>
> **DAN MORELLE**

What's the Octopus and why should readers be excited by it?

Yunus: My first idea was that there is no good Dreamcast arcade stick – there is an official arcade stick but it's not a professional arcade stick. Professional arcade players and tournament people, they just want a solid arcade stick.

Dan: They also want arcade-quality components as well, like Sanwa buttons.

Yunus: These people know how candy cabs feel, Japanese-style cabs – they touch it and they know the quality. I just wanted to create a good arcade stick for Dreamcast because there were some small PCBs people just put inside, but my PCB design is completely different – we emulate the VMU, and it's acting 100% like an original, but everything is in the SD card and you can put the card in your PC and get your VMU save games.

Dan: It started out as a Dreamcast fight stick and then we talked about, "Do we want to just make a stick or do we want to do something beyond just one product?"

How did Brook Gaming get involved with the project?

Dan: I think that was week two or week three.

Yunus: They messaged, "Do you want to talk about business?" I thought, "Yes, why not," because we were already talking about the multi-stick, but we started the crowdfunding with only Dreamcast. We just decided to talk with them and they are very good partners and they understand us.

Dan: Some people think that we're integrating the existing boards that they make, but we're making a brand-new board with Brook for Octopus.

The *What's In The Case?* trailer for the Octopus is very unusual…

Dan: One afternoon, Yunus shows me a ten-minute show reel, a demo thing for them to show what they could achieve on the screen. In one of the shots Yunus is picked up and thrown against the wall really violently, and it's quite dramatic. That night, I wake up at like two o'clock in the morning with a start going, "Holy shit, we're gonna have to throw Yunus against the wall to promote the fight stick."

Yunus: When I called people, they just asked me, "Are you going back to the cinema industry?" I never left the cinema, I just want to create something. Everybody told me, "If you are in, we are in, no problem."

When can people expect to buy an Octopus?

Dan: We're hoping to deliver around July/August time. There may be some slippage, around a month or two, but we're really focussed on getting the product delivered on time because we want to cement out our relationship with the community so we can go on to do more projects.

Are you working on anything else at the moment?

Dan: There was a massive earthquake, a huge disaster in Turkey that occurred around February last year, so 10% of the funds that we raise from the Indiegogo are going to an earthquake recovery charity.

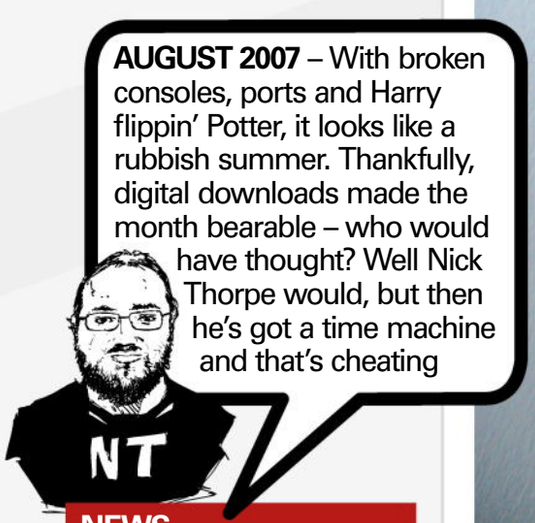
Yunus: I'm working on a bar top arcade design, as most people cannot put arcade cabinets in their home. I think it will be our second crowdfunding campaign.

Dan: Our vision is about looking back at and looking forward to arcade, and how we can kind of reintroduce it into the world in a bigger way. That will require a lot more people and a lot more money, but we think we're just laying the foundation now.

Find out more about the Octopus at trfightstick.com

» You can see the integrated VMU display is positioned centrally at the top of the Octopus.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES



AUGUST 2007 – With broken consoles, ports and Harry flippin' Potter, it looks like a rubbish summer. Thankfully, digital downloads made the month bearable – who would have thought? Well Nick Thorpe would, but then he's got a time machine and that's cheating

» Microsoft was keen to downplay just how many Xbox 360s were seeing this unwelcome sight.

NEWS AUGUST 2007

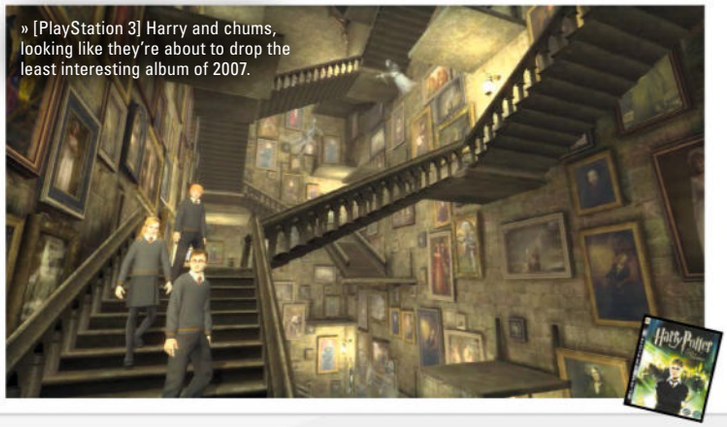
DC Thomson's long-running weekly comic *The Dandy* was relaunched as the fortnightly *Dandy Xtreme* this month, after almost 70 years of publication. The new magazine format shifted comics to a central pull-out section, with the rest "packed with the stuff the kids need to stay in the loop" according to editor Craig Graham – a change emphasised by Bart Simpson's turn as the cover star. *The Dandy* returned to its original title and format in October 2010.

High School Musical 2 premiered on the Disney Channel on 17 August, achieving a record basic cable viewership of 17.2 million viewers, with subsequent weekend showings bringing in an additional 15.8 million viewers. It also drew 1.2 million viewers to the UK's Disney Channel.

Rhys Jones was murdered in Liverpool on 22 August, at the age of 11. The schoolboy was shot dead while walking home from football practice, an innocent victim of 16-year-old Sean Mercer's attempts to shoot members of a rival gang. Mercer was found guilty of murder in December 2008 and sentenced to life imprisonment, with a minimum term of 22 years. Five other members of the Croxteth Crew gang were convicted of assisting an offender.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM AUGUST 2007

This month saw Microsoft under pressure over reports that the Xbox 360 was suffering from widespread reliability problems, particularly a fatal flaw resulting in the Red Ring Of Death. *Edge* reported that the company "denies that there is a systemic problem with the hardware" and noted that it was "charging out-of-warranty customers for the privilege of fixing it despite there being no sure-fire method of delivering a long-term fix". Diarmid Andrews of repair shop GT Electronics told *Edge* that the GPU "gets too hot and melts the solder that's holding it in place" and expressed frustration with Microsoft's claims that design revisions had fixed the issue. The magazine also reported that the EU had requested more information from Microsoft after reports of consoles scratching discs.



» [PlayStation 3] Harry and chums, looking like they're about to drop the least interesting album of 2007.

EA was aiming for a summer blockbuster with its console adaptation of *Harry Potter And The Order Of The Phoenix*, but it proved curiously divisive with the critics. The PS3 version scored 8/10 in *Official PlayStation Magazine*, 4/10 in *PSU3* and 32% in *Play*, the Xbox 360 version earned 7/10 in *Official Xbox 360 Magazine*, 3/5 in *360* and 4/10 in *X360*, and the Wii version got 82% from *Official Nintendo Magazine* and 5.2/10 from *nRevolution*. *OPM* felt that it was a "top-notch sandbox adventure" with gameplay that "isn't *Spider-Man 3*-style busywork where every minute feels like a week", whereas *X360* complained that "mundane" and "bland" objectives that were "never challenging, ever" made it "just too dull".

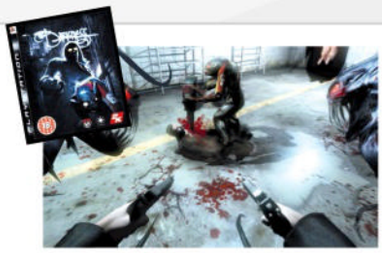
With an absence of strong contenders, it was a different licensed game that proved to be the big game of the month – *The Darkness*, based on the comic series of the same name.

Starbreeze's first-person shooter scored 9/10 in *Official 360*, 8/10 in *PSU3*, 8/10 in *games™*, 4/5 in 360, 7/10 in *Edge* and 6/10 in *OPM*. The *games™* review recommended it to "the type of gamer who longs for escapism, for originality, for style and for panache", whereas *OPM* believed that it "feels like a clutter of poorly executed ideas held together with little more than good intentions".

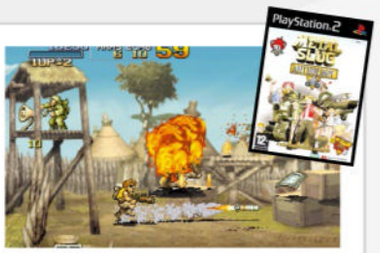
Beyond that, much of the month's best fare consisted of ports. *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Vegas* arrived on PS3, with the tactical shooter earning 88% from *Play*, 8/10 from *OPM* and 8/10 from *PSU3*. *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2* entered the PC theatre of operations and scored 79% in *PC Gamer*. The licensed open-world crime adventure *Scarface: The World Is Yours* came to Wii, scoring 83% in *ONM* and 7.7/10 in *nRevolution*. On the PSP, *Tomb Raider: Anniversary*'s take on Lara Croft's first adventure got 8/10 in *OPM* and 6/10 in *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine*, while PlayStation rhythm action throwback *PaRappa The Rapper* earned 88% in *Play*, 7/10 in *Official PS2* and 4/10 in *OPM*. SNK Playmore's *Metal Slug Anthology* proved to be one of the more generous compilations out there, comprising all six Neo Geo entries in the series as well as *Metal Slug 6* – a game that had only launched in arcades in 2006. The collection of run-and-guns earned 8/10 from *Official PS2*, which felt that the £15 price point was a bargain for the "incredibly funny" games. *OPM* gave it 7/10, feeling that, "*Metal Slug*'s best is way off PS2's best" as the games were "attractive, enjoyable and accomplished, but also dated."

Fortunately, downloadable games based on the hits of the past were around to save the month. *Official 360* gave *Prince Of Persia* 9/10, praising Gameloft's graphical update of the 1989 game as "a classic reborn" with its only complaint being the lack of a classic graphics mode. "Great to look at and the new mazes rock," was the summary for *Pac-Man Championship Edition*, which earned 8/10 in the same magazine, and *Track & Field* earned 7/10 for offering "a lot of pain and a lot of pleasure." On the PS3, *Edge*'s 8/10 review claimed that *Super Stardust HD* "stands out as one of the best" downloadable shooters. *PSU3* gave it 4/5 and *Play* gave it 74%. The Cops and robbers-themed *Calling All Cars* also impressed, earning 4/5 in *PSU3* and 81% in *Play*, with the latter claiming that it's "incredible fun in multiplayer" but "does make you swear at your mates a lot".

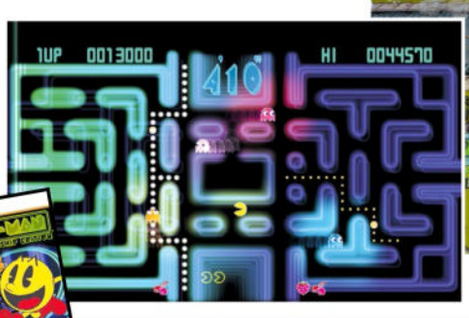
Will Microsoft finally admit that the Xbox 360 design is faulty? Find out here next month.



» [PlayStation 3] We were wondering about that 18 rating until we spotted all the ketchup!



» [PlayStation 2] *Metal Slug Anthology* offered up a decade of carnage.



» [Xbox 360] *Pac-Man Championship Edition* might just be the best variation of the classic arcade game.

» [PlayStation 3] Apparently, *Calling All Cars* was the successor to an office *Micro Machines* obsession.

CHARTS

AUGUST 2007

XBOX 360

1 – **Forza Motorsport 2** (Microsoft)
2 – **Shadowrun** (Microsoft)
3 – **Pirates Of The Caribbean: At World's End** (Disney)
4 – **Command & Conconquer 3** (EA)
5 – **Gears Of War** (Microsoft)

PLAYSTATION 3

1 – **Pirates Of The Caribbean: At World's End** (Disney)
2 – **Spider-Man 3** (Activision)
3 – **MotorStorm** (Sony)
4 – **Resistance: Fall Of Man** (Sony)
5 – **The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion** (Ubisoft)

WII

1 – **Wii Play** (Nintendo)
2 – **Mario Strikers Charged Football** (Nintendo)
3 – **Pirates Of The Caribbean: At World's End** (Disney)
4 – **Sonic And The Secret Rings** (Sega)
5 – **The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess** (Nintendo)

MUSIC

1 – **With Every Heartbeat** (Robyn with Kleerup)
2 – **The Way I Are** (Timbaland ft. Doe/Keri Hilson)
3 – **Stronger** (Kanye West)
4 – **Foundations** (Kate Nash)
5 – **Big Girls Don't Cry** (Fergie)

THIS MONTH IN...

Official PlayStation Magazine

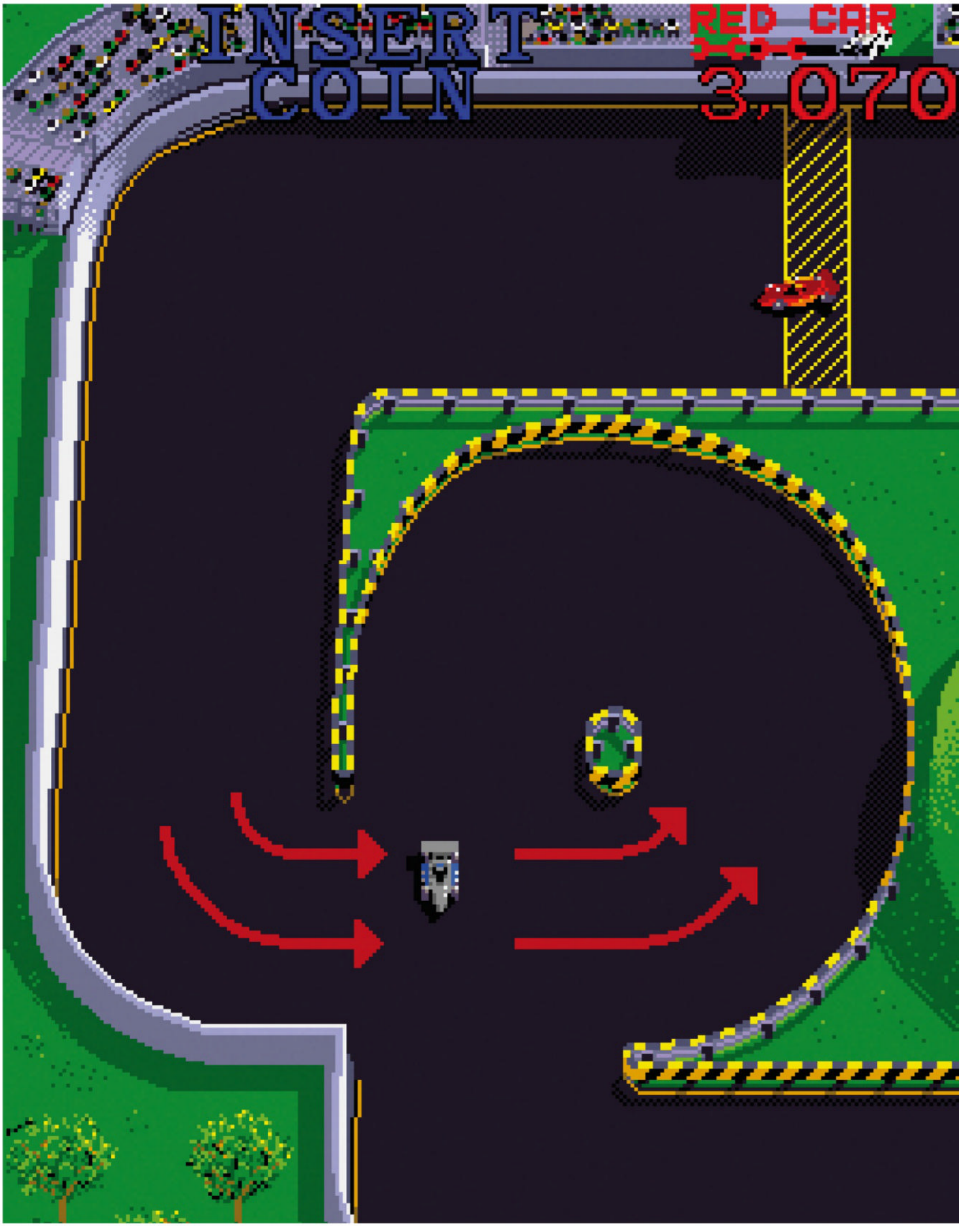
"By rights it shouldn't even be called a game. It's a slap in the face of games." What has drawn *OPM*'s ire? A release of *Dragon's Lair* on Blu-Ray, which scored 1/10. "It's a shame our scoring system doesn't go any lower," it concludes.

Official Nintendo Magazine

"I feel sorry for Bradley Wright-Phillips. Why does Ian never appear in adverts with him?" asks forum user Wreck_and_Rule, who claims "comedy football appeals as much to me as having my eyeball perforated with a rusty needle".

Official Xbox 360 Magazine

"I have spent £83.86 on your magazine," says reader TKC Dr Zoidberg, who claims to be a student that can't regularly afford games. "I really like your magazine, but I could buy both *Guitar Hero II* and *Command & Conquer 3* for that."


INSERT
COIN
RED CAR
3,070

Super Sprint

SPIN THAT WHEEL

» ARCADE » 1986 » ATARI GAMES

When I was reading through issue 1 of Retro Gamer recently, I noticed a news story on the incoming release of Digital Eclipse's *Midway Arcade Treasures*. It caught my attention because that 'new' compilation is not only 21 years old now – it debuted in North America in 2003 – but it's significantly different to the compilations that Digital Eclipse now releases.

The compilation itself is filled with absolute bangers, from *Paperboy*, *Joust* and *Defender*, to *Gauntlet*, *Robotron: 2084* and *Bubbles*, but one of the games I was most looking forward to playing on it also turned out to be one of the most disappointing.

I've great memories of playing Atari's original *Super Sprint*, even if I wasn't very good at it. Not only was it a behemoth of a cab with three authentic-looking steering wheels bolted on the front of it, as well as some cleverly designed tracks, but my cousin Nick was absolutely amazing at it. I'd watch in astonishment as he made a single ten pence piece seemingly last forever, spinning the steering wheel like a kid possessed and effortlessly making first place in every race. I can still hear the deep groaning sounds that the wheel made as he viciously spun it and I wonder how many times those wheels had to be repaired due to his aggressive approach to Atari's game.

It was always great fun watching him dominate that game in the arcades, and I intended to achieve the same thing at home with my Xbox and a copy of Digital Eclipse's compilation. Unfortunately, the controls never felt as responsive as they did in the original arcade game and I struggled to make any significant progression in it. I guess *Super Sprint* is just one of those games that offers a far better experience on original hardware. Although, if I'm honest, I was rubbish at the arcade game as well. ✱

JOIN THE RETRO GAMER TEAM AS WE HIGHLIGHT THE CLASSIC GAMES THAT HAVE HAD A LASTING IMPACT ON BOTH READERS AND DEVELOPERS

WORDS BY ADAM BARNES, DAVID CROOKES, WILL FREEMAN, DAMIANO GERLI, FAITH JOHNSON, DARRAN JONES, PAUL KAUTZ, GRAEME MASON, RORY MILNE AND NICK THORPE

Seeing you've joined us for such an important issue, it seemed only right that we look at the many great games that have defined our hobby over the decades. Readers, developers and **Retro Gamer** contributors have told us about the games they feel have helped define the industry and we're delighted to share them with you here.

Many of the games on this list are true trailblazers in their respective genres. Some kick-started the very genre itself, while others built on the work of previous games to shape the genre for the better or take it in new and exciting directions.

Of course, not every game necessarily fits this ideal, some define convention or feel so detached from a genre's staples that they need their own new subcategory to define them – you'll find those here too.

So what you may ask, qualifies as a retro game for this particular list? Basically the rules from issue 255 allowed for any PC games released in 2007 and before and any console games from the PS2 era, so Xbox, Gamecube, PlayStation 2 and Nintendo's Game Boy Advance were all eligible, along with any home computers, consoles, handhelds and arcade games before that.

Even with a 2007 cut-off point it meant that thousands upon thousands of games were eligible for inclusion and we saw all sorts of lists, some featured established favourites, while others had odd curiosities that we're looking forward to trying out. It's great to see games like *Psyvariar*, *Project Firestart* and *Moley Christmas* being championed as a person's most important game, even if nobody else voted for them. Gaming can be a greatly personal thing and the emotional impact a game can have on you is really quite something.

While we had a huge number of contributions from everyone, not every game is equal and it's completely possible that your choices haven't made the final cut (Nick had an extensive list of games to process in order to hammer out the final 100). Even if your most important retro game of all time hasn't been included, we hope that you still enjoy trawling through the next 30 pages. And who knows? Maybe the game in question that you hold so dearly is seen that way by others and has actually made the coveted top spot. You'll just have to read on to find out. (Don't worry, it's not *Strider*.)

100

CIVILIZATION

MICROPROSE • 1991

It's a true testament to *Civilization*'s innovative concept that, despite iterating over more than three decades, the core gameplay mechanisms of exploring, expanding, exploiting and exterminating as you guide your chosen empire from the dawn of man to the space age remain as irresistible as ever. **AB**

"Through the Advances Chart one could play out the ultimate gaming fantasy – managing the course of human progress!"
BRENT ELLISON
THE SECRET WORLD

99

PITFALL!

ACTIVISION • 1982

Atari's original VCS (aka Atari 2600) was good for many things, but certainly not for creating complex platformers. Enter David Crane, who proved with this 1982 classic that he was able to get the absolute maximum out of the console's feeble hardware: a huge, defining adventure made in just four kilobytes! **PK**

"Taking the lead of what *Adventure* pioneered, *Pitfall!* made a grand colourful world of adventure with virtually no data per room/level."
TOM HALL
COMMANDER KEEN, DOOM

98

BOMB JACK

TEHKAN • 1984

Tehkan's *Bomb Jack* was a refreshing breather from the banks of shoot-'em-ups and driving games that dominated arcades throughout the Eighties. Defusing bombs around various famous locations remains an utterly compelling loop, while special mention goes to Elite's genuinely superb Spectrum and Amstrad CPC home conversions. **GM**

"I never played the arcade version but if it's as addictive as the Speccie version I would have spent too much money on it."
BILL HARBISON
ARTIST, OCEAN

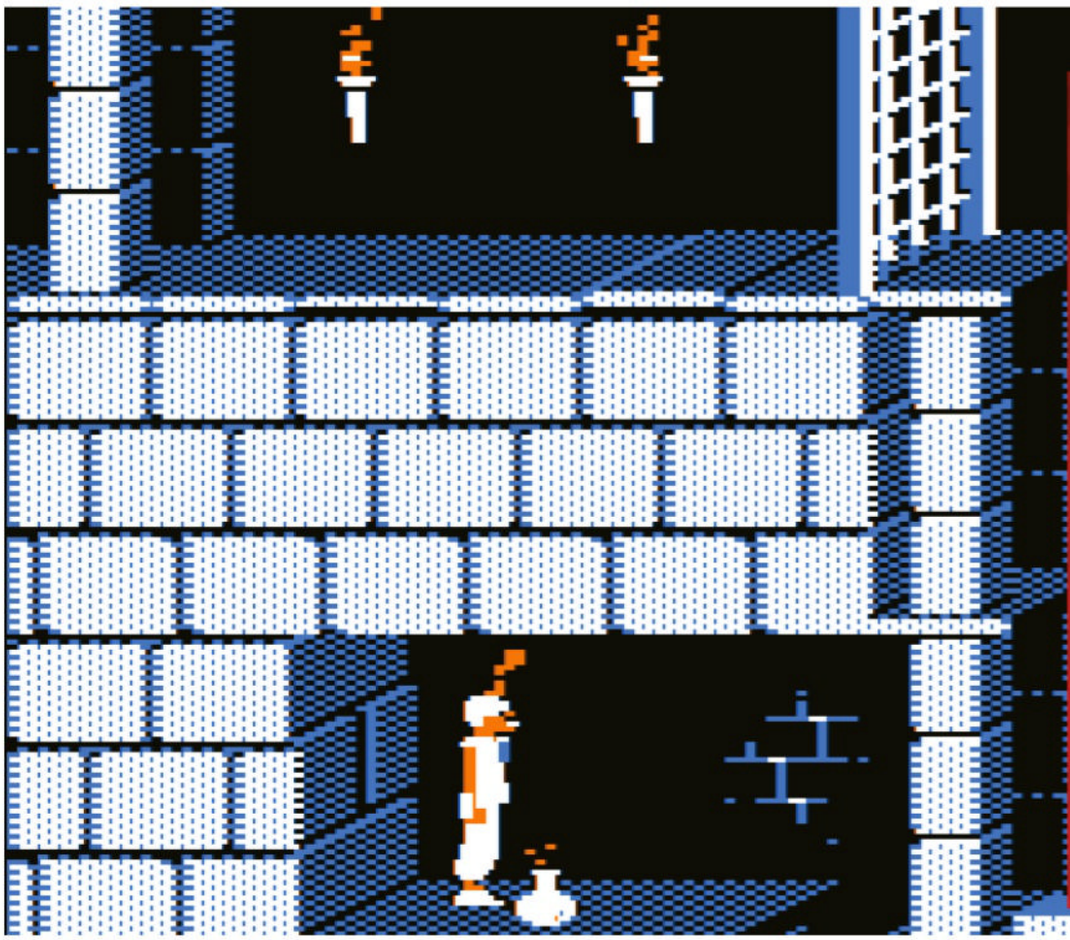
97

THE SENTINEL

GEOFF CRAMMOND • 1986

It's telling that there have been so few replications of Geoff Crammond's epic strategy gem. Yes it might take a long time to draw everything up on the screen, but that just adds to the game's tense atmosphere. Titles like *The Sentinel* proved that home computers could offer rich, deep experiences. **DJ**

"Another game that did a lot with a little in terms of visuals and graphics horsepower. Simple clever game design that managed to be quite ominous and sinister somehow."
MARTIN EDMONDSON
SHADOW OF THE BEAST, DRIVER



96

PRINCE OF PERSIA

BRØDERBUND SOFTWARE • 1989

Developed by Jordan Mechner on the Apple II, *Prince Of Persia* took platform gaming to another level. Aside from using the same rotoscoping technique from his earlier game, *Karateka,* Mechner imbued *Prince Of Persia* with clever puzzles, a compelling backstory and a strict one-hour time limit, heralding the start of a long-running franchise. **DC**

"*Prince Of Persia* not only looked the part, but it FELT the part. It achieved this not by difficulty, but by using music, clever animation, cutscenes and anticipation. In other words, it was cinematic and the game industry has never been the same since."
MIKE MIKA
LLAMASOFT: THE JEFF MINTER STORY, ATARI 50: THE CELEBRATION

95

STARCRAFT

BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT • 1998

Arguably more than any other RTS of the time, *StarCraft* was built from the ground up with multiplayer in mind. It required more quick-thinking planning and skilled reactions than any other RTS from the era, even more than Blizzard's other RTS title, *Warcraft*. As a result a strong esports scene built up around the game that has persisted to this day. **AB**

"The one-disc, two-player solution was the breakthrough of [South Korea's] *Baangs*, which became the true foundation of competitive online gaming worldwide."
ROGIER VAN KRALINGEN
RETRO GAMER PATRON

94

SHINING FORCE III

CAMELOT SOFTWARE PLANNING/ SONIC! SOFTWARE PLANNING • 1999

Split across three scenarios, with only the first being released outside of Japan, *Shining Force III* continues the saga of one of gaming's great RPG series. It's known for its rich, deep and intriguing story as well as its exciting combat cutscenes that include hundreds of variations. **FJ**

"The Saturn deserved more respect and *Shining Force III* should give many reasons to respect the machine. It's fantastic to play and look at. And those battle scenes... absolutely wow, even today."
DARREN NICHOLLS
RETRO GAMER PATRON

93

DAY OF THE TENTACLE

LUCASARTS • 1993

LucasArt's superb sequel to the classic *Maniac Mansion* is a point-and-click adventure through time. Bernard, Hoagie and Laverne can send items across time to one another through the chrono-john. This clever game design is as impressive now as it was on release and it's telling that so few games have managed to be as successful with similar concepts. **DG**

"Humour, great art direction, great writing, clever but ridiculous puzzles, history, time travel, it had it all! But wait, who is Tentacle, again?"
TIM LONGO
STAR WARS: STARFIGHTER, HALO: INFINITE

"I still make the pick up noises from this game to myself sometimes."
ALAN GALLACHER
RETRO GAMER PATRON

92

ULTIMA IV: QUEST OF THE AVATAR

ORIGIN SYSTEMS • 1985

Everyone will have their own personal favourite *Ultima* game, what with there being so many of these classic CRPGs. But *Ultima IV* eschewed cliched RPG tropes and a generic goal of hunting the Big Bad Guy as a primary directive for a story and experience centred around morality, self-improvement and spiritual enlightenment. **AB**

"Richard Garriott breathes life into an enormous world and challenges your morals like no other game did in 1985."
NEIL THOMAS
RMCRETRO, THE CAVE

91

ROBOTRON: 2084

VID KIDZ • 1982

While it might not be the first twin-stick shooter, *Robotron*'s hypnotic gameplay ensures it remains one of the best. Its influence can be seen in numerous later games, while its fusion of chaotically filled screens, raucous spot effects and in-the-zone energy make it impossible to forget. **DJ**

"I loved *Robotron*. I would play that game and get so amped up I would find it hard to go to sleep after playing it late in the evening."
ED LOGG
ASTEROIDS, XYBOTS

"Good thing ChatGPT doesn't have a laser gun!"
EUGENE JARVIS
DEFENDER, ROBOTRON: 2084

90

MARIO KART 64

NINTENDO EAD • 1996

The N64 was given four controller ports because it copes well with four-player split-screen, and thanks to leveraging this feature *Mario Kart 64* became the system's killer party game. Its Nintendo character competitors add charm, and its courses incorporate verticality with the likes of bridges and ramps. Let's just not talk about that pesky Blue Shell… **RM**

"I never really understood why everybody was so fond of the SNES game, but once it made the jump to true 3D, I fell in love too."
FRANK MATZKE
MEGA TURRICAN, APIDYA

"Arguably popularised multiplayer kart racing. Featuring beloved characters, power-ups and imaginative tracks, it became a staple for social gaming."
MICHAEL WILLIAMS
RETRO GAMER PATRON

87

STREET FIGHTER III: 3RD STRIKE

CAPCOM • 1999

It's hard to believe now, but *Street Fighter III* was initially shunned for its unfamiliar cast and unfashionable 2D graphics. Then Evo Moment #37 went viral, and that bit of esports magic caused many players to re-examine the final version of the game, leading to more widespread appreciation of its refined gameplay, exquisite animation, eclectic fighters and memorable soundtrack. **NT**

89

BOMBERMAN

HUDSON SOFT • 1990

Though *Bomberman* had been around since 1983, it was his first PC Engine outing that added five-player battles, turning a mildly diverting maze game into a perennial party classic. *Bomberman*'s multiplayer mayhem enabled the series to carry on long after players had lost interest in most other maze games. **NT**

88

DIABLO

BLIZZARD NORTH • 1997

It was a revelation when *Diablo* brought the otherwise slow, thoughtful and typically turn-based RPG genre crashing into the real-time age, but the fact that it was tied to a gothic angels versus demons setting that hadn't been done before made it especially captivating. An entire '*Diablo*-clone' subgenre of RPG spawned soon after. **AB**

"Action RPGs were finally perfected."
SCOTT MILLER
DUKE NUKEM 3D, SUPERNOVA

86

ZELDA: MAJORA'S MASK

NINTENDO EAD • 2000

It might feel smaller in scope than its N64 predecessor, but *Majora's Mask* is arguably more epic in both its storytelling and ambition. Guiding Link through a three-day cycle to prevent the moon from obliterating Hyrule is an exceptionally compelling task that's filled with clever puzzles and memorable characters. How Nintendo knocked this out in 15 months we'll never know. **DJ**

"*Majora's Mask* is a delightfully unique *Zelda* adventure I find myself returning to time and again, and not just because Tingle's in it!" **ASHLEY DAY** FREELANCER

85

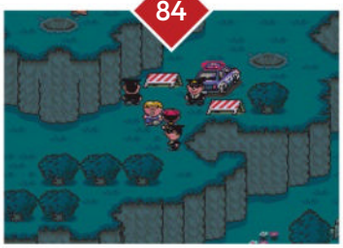
DROPZONE

ARENA GRAPHICS • 1984

Archer MacLean's debut remains one of the best *Defender*-clones ever released, with beautiful pick-up-and-play mechanics and rich gameplay that's still deep enough to warrant your time. It's a classic example of how inferior technology can match, or ever better the game it's trying to emulate. **DG**

"Not dissimilar from *Defender*, which Archer also programmed. I bought an Atari 800XL just to play this game, and watch the lush presentation."
ANDREW BRAYBROOK
URIDIUM, GRIBBLY'S DAY OUT

84



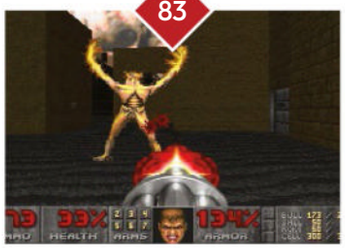
EARTHBOUND

APE INC/HAL LABORATORY • 1994

Shigesato Itoi's offbeat RPG forgoes the typical swords and sorcery for a contemporary American setting, in which you fight hot coffee, hippies and piles of vomit. Though it featured gameplay innovations like the rolling HP counter and instant victories against weak enemies, it's the writing that makes *Earthbound* a true classic. **NT**

"This game is all feels. A genuine hug of a game."
SAM BARLOW
SILENT HILL ORIGINS, IMMORTALITY

83



DOOM II

ID SOFTWARE • 1994

While less revolutionary than its illustrious predecessor, *Doom II* still did many interesting things. Along with ditching the episode format, it introduced new enemies such as the Revenant and Arch-vile, plus great new maps and even more frantic action. It highlights that 'bigger, better, faster, more' can be a perfectly acceptable sequel approach. **DG**

"Two words make this better than the first one. Super and shotgun."
ALAN GALLACHER
RETRO GAMER PATRON

82

CHRONO TRIGGER

SQUARE • 1995

Created by some of the brightest minds in the Japanese RPG industry, *Chrono Trigger* could only result in one of the most unforgettable RPGs ever made. Its tackling of time is still handled extremely well and feels utterly compelling and it features one of the best soundtracks ever put on a game cartridge. **DG**

"This is my favourite RPG. Time travel, sense of humour, player choice, 13 endings... so amazing."
TOM HALL
COMMANDER KEEN, DOOM

81

MARBLE MADNESS

ATARI GAMES • 1984

Beautifully presented in an unearthly isometric style inspired by the art of Escher, *Marble Madness* was the perfect game for a trackball controller and a delightfully diverse experience for arcade fans. The task is simple: guide your marble down the screen to the finish line as quickly as possible. Enemy marbles and some wickedly designed courses make this an arduous challenge. It's an early example of videogame art **GM**

"An incredible achievement – the porting of a wonderful game from a $10,000 arcade cabinet to the most innovative and advanced PC [Amiga] in the mid-Eighties.**"**
TRIP HAWKINS
FOUNDER, ELECTRONIC ARTS

80

VIRTUA FIGHTER

SEGA AM2 • 1993

3D gaming was in its infancy when *Virtua Fighter* wowed audiences with its revolutionary polygonal graphics. Many developers have since cited it as an inspiration for their 3D games and its influence on gaming was recognised when it was inducted into the Smithsonian. **FJ**

"It blew my mind when I first played it at CES in 1993. I came back to work full of ideas about how polygonal character-based adventures were going to be a big thing."
SIMON PHIPPS
RICK DANGEROUS, SWITCHBLADE

79

RAINBOW ISLANDS

TAITO • 1987

Taito's vertically scrolling platformer was packed with innovative ideas, buried secrets and hidden game systems, and almost 40 years since release it still feels remarkably vibrant and slick. To play the *Bubble Bobble* sequel 'properly' is to understand a game with tremendous depth, that offers a rich feast of play that can entertain for years. **WF**

"One of the most imaginative firing-and-jumping systems in a climb-'em-up. It has a brilliant bonus system and an enormous 40-level play area with at least three endings, or was it four?"
ANDREW BRAYBROOK
URIDIUM, GRIBBLY'S DAY OUT

78

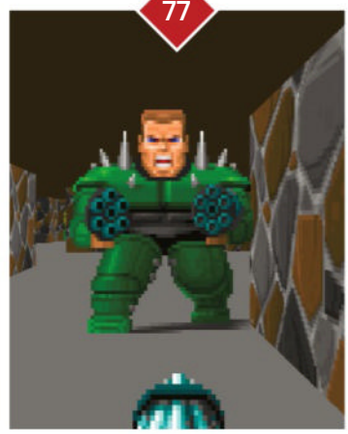
DOUBLE DRAGON

TECHNOS JAPAN • 1987

Even if *Double Dragon* wasn't the very first multiplayer co-op brawler it certainly defined the subgenre. As well as introducing the idea of player characters using weapons dropped by defeated enemies, the Technos beat-'em-up has a surprise ending where its heroes fight against each other to win the game, and the girl. **RM**

"A quality game in two-player mode, I had many battles with this game!"
MATT RISLEY SCOOBY DOO MYSTERY, QUEEN: THE EYE

77



WOLFENSTEIN 3D

ID SOFTWARE • 1992

Id Software's 1992 over-the-top, no-holds-barred violent Nazi shoot-fest showed in gloriously gory VGA colours what the new definition of an action game looked like. Not only was *Wolfenstein 3D* an astonishing game and technical marvel, it also paved the way for the modern first-person shooter. **PK**

"Created the first-person shooter genre."
SCOTT MILLER
DUKE NUKEM 3D, SUPERNOVA

76

DIABLO II

BLIZZARD NORTH • 2000

The sequel to the action RPG that put action back on the map is of the bigger and better variety, with more enemies, sprawling locations not limited to dungeons, plus an unforgettable soundtrack by Matt Uelmen. It's a truly staggering sequel that not only improved massively on the original classic, but also shaped the very genre itself. **DG**

"Still play it. Will never not play it. Nuff said."
CHRIS SEAVOR
CONKER'S BAD FUR DAY,

75

PHANTASY STAR ONLINE

SONIC TEAM • 2000

Not just a great game due to its unique four-player experience, *Phantasy Star Online* also had real-time translation that enabled players to chat from around the globe. The communities that grew at the time still exist on fan-made servers and its influence is still seen in online console gaming today. **FJ**

"A truly amazing experience, with an unmatched atmosphere. For me it is still unrivalled when it comes to art and sound design."
ANDY DAVIDSON
WORMS, WORMS 2

74

SPACEWAR!

STEVE RUSSELL • 1962

Starting life in Steve Russell's own words as a "spare time project" *Spacewar!* would go on to leave a rich legacy, whether directly or indirectly. It inspired Nolan Bushnell to release *Computer Space*, highlighted the excitement of PVP gaming, introduced aspects like physics to games and much more. Not bad for something that started life as a spaceship trainer. **DJ**

"It's the first two-player videogame that inspired Nolan Bushnell."
ALEXANDER PENN
RETRO GAMER PATRON

"This one started it all! An incredible PVP space shooter with gravity!"
EUGENE JARVIS
DEFENDER, ROBOTRON: 2084

73

METROID PRIME

RETRO STUDIOS • 2002

Not only does *Metroid Prime* effortlessly recreate the *Metroid* formula in 3D, it also introduces plenty of new mechanics, including an excellent scanning system that offers a new spin on environmental storytelling. Recently re-released on Nintendo's Switch, it remains arguably the best game in the trilogy and even gives the mighty *Super Metroid* a run for its money. **DJ**

"A sense of presence and embodiment unmatched since. Play on the original hardware for the real experience."
SAM BARLOW HER STORY, IMMORTALITY

72

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2

NEVERSOFT • 2000

If the first *Tony Hawk's* PlayStation release thrust skateboarding back into the centre of global popular culture, its sequel refined the game concept significantly. Thanks to a dazzling blend of meticulous level design, a broadened trick catalogue and a deep understanding of skateboarding, it remains one of the sport's best digital interpretations. **WF**

"I mean, do you even need to put words to this. The best sports game, the best way to hang with your friends and what a soundtrack."
AJ GRAND-SCRUTTON
BATTLETOADS, THE ESCAPISTS

71

SIMCITY

MAXIS • 1989

An entire genre was born after *SimCity*'s release in 1989, but crucially the game also proved something about gamers as a whole. We don't necessarily need monsters to shoot and objectives to aim for, sometimes the act of creating in a game is just as fulfilling as destroying when the simulation is as organically compelling as this. **AB**

"*SimCity* was another game I spent months playing, both at home, and at work – the whole office played it at lunchtimes. Brilliant fun."
MIKE DAILLY
LEMMINGS, GRAND THEFT AUTO

70

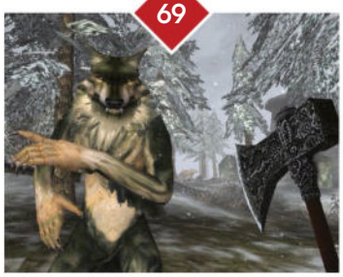
SUPER MONKEY BALL

AMUSEMENT VISION • 2001

This quirky Sega arcade title stripped everything back to a simple mechanic at a time when games were becoming increasingly more complex. No buttons, no jumps, no equipment. It's just you and your simian hurtling down courses in a race against the clock. Pure gameplay that still feels fresh today. **FJ**

"Nothing before or after has captured such magic as this. Not even the sequel, which proved that you could have all the ingredients of a master work and still end up with an unpleasant result."
ARA SHIRINIAN
EPIC MICKEY: POWER OF ILLUSION

69



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS • 2002

Notable for its "free-form experience" and for being the first time the series appeared on a console (Microsoft's Xbox) *Morrowind* is another sprawling Bethesda epic. While it builds on its rich fantasy roots, *Morrowind* also borrows various steampunk elements and even leans on East Asian culture at times. The end result is a thoroughly unique adventure that you can tackle as you see fit. **DJ**

"The scale of *Morrowind* truly is a sight to behold."
KARL BOURKE
RETRO GAMER PATRON

68

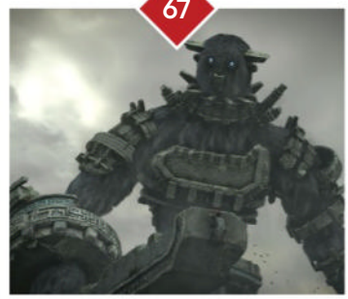
SOULCALIBUR

NAMCO • 1998

When Namco's sequel to its 1996 game *Soul Edge* hit the arcades a couple of years later, it was an instant smash-hit, thanks to its brilliant graphics, amazing fighting system, well-rounded fighter roster and great multiplayer mode. The Dreamcast conversion, following one year later, was even better, featuring a ton of improvements and additions. **PK**

"Amazing graphics and music, balanced characters with ridiculously oversized weapons – my favourite fighting game"
STEPHEN WARD RETRO GAMER PATRON

67



SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

TEAM ICO • 2005

Fumito Ueda's *Ico* follow-up pushed the PS2 to its absolute limits. While it's essentially a boss rush, it's a boss rush that features some of the most magnificent creations to ever grace any console. From the exploration of its hauntingly beautiful landscape, to the dawning realisation that comes from toppling each huge foe it really does stand the test of time. **DJ**

"The perfect blend of vision, gameplay and epic feeling of place and myth."
TIM LONGO
STAR WARS: STARFIGHTER

"I was torn between this and *Ico*, but despite *Ico* having more nostalgia chills and fond moments, *Shadow* is just so much the better game."
CHRIS SEAVOR
CONKER'S BAD FUR DAY

66

JET SET RADIO

SMILEBIT • 2000

Smilebit's ambitious open-world game won numerous awards on release due to its stylistic artwork and smooth animations. *Jet Set Radio* features cel-shaded graphics that still influence developers today and it's also notable for its soundtrack which featured production levels uncommon in videogames at the time. **FJ**

65

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

NINTENDO R&D4 • 1986

Open worlds weren't nearly so common in the mid-Eighties as they are today, but this adventure gave players a real sense of freedom by letting them figure things out on their own. That, and one of the most memorable tunes of any game, ensures that it lives long in the memory. **NT**

"Influenced countless other games." **DAVID PERRY** EARTHWORM JIM

"It's only in the last two years that I first played this game, and for an old game it is mighty addictive." **KAREN STACEY** RETRO GAMER PATRON

64

SEGA RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

SEGA AM2 • 1995

Sega Rally Championship quickly became a firm arcade favourite due to its realistic driving and excellent graphics that ran at a high speed. It was the first game to feature different surface types affecting car handling and is often credited as an influence on developers making racing games today. **FJ**

"It was THE game in the arcade and then I could play it every night at home. I can hear that bassline starting now. Sega's AM teams were gods in my book."
ALEX WARD
BURNOUT 3, BLACK

63

COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT

WESTWOOD STUDIOS • 1996

Red Alert refined what the original *C&C* started, and these days it's a time capsule of Westwood at its peak: high-quality visuals, finely balanced gameplay, a unique setting with tongue-in-cheek FMVs and a campy personality that gave it a stronger identity than anything else out there at the time. **AB**

"The moment strategy games reached freedom of choice."
ROGIER VAN KRALINGEN
RETRO GAMER PATRON

62

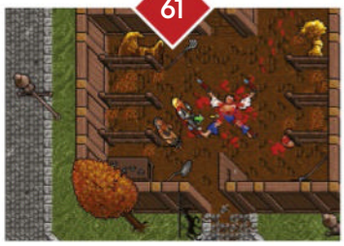
ICO

TEAM ICO • 2001

Hand in hand, two characters alone traverse a desolate landscape while trying to survive. Mixing action adventure with puzzles, completely immersing the player through the lack of a HUD, this is a simple concept executed beautifully by Fumito Ueda. Its influence can be seen in numerous modern games. **DG**

"*Ico* paved the way for both thoughtful indie games and AAA titles inspired by Fumito Ueda's design approach."
GRAHAM PEMBREY FREELANCER

61

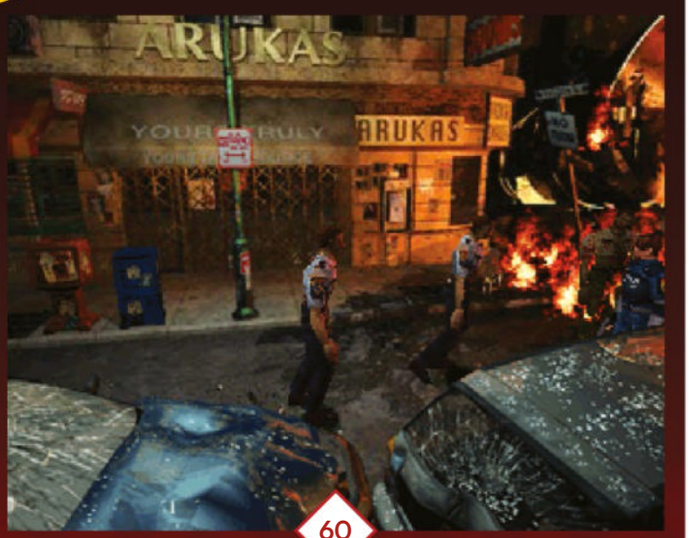


ULTIMA VII: THE BLACK GATE

ORIGIN SYSTEMS • 1992

The seventh game in Origin's long-running series essentially rewrote the rulebook for Western RPGs. Many of its firsts for the *Ultima* series – dialogue trees, being mouse-driven, playing largely in real-time – would be adopted or enhanced by later games, while its interactive game world felt like nothing else. A true evolution of a benchmark series. **DJ**

"As a game developer I've been constantly attempting to make games in the mould of various iterations of *Ultima*. *Ultima VII* is my white whale!"
BRENT ELLISON
THE SECRET WORLD



60

RESIDENT EVIL 2

CAPCOM • 1998

Capcom's decision to open *Resident Evil 2* into the nearby Raccoon City proved another hit. Again, players could assume one of two roles with different puzzles and situations. Meanwhile, the Raccoon City Police Department, like Spencer Mansion, is a character itself as the Tyrant stalks its ornate hallways. A successful 2019 remake proved that there's still love for this brilliant sequel. **GM**

59

DAYTONA USA

SEGA AM2 • 1994

There aren't many titles that scream Nineties arcade gaming more than a row of *Daytona USA* cabinets filled with gamers jostling for position during a race. From cutting-edge visuals to bold sound design, damage to cars and hectic eight-player showdowns, everything was taken to a level not seen before. **FJ**

"Family holidays in Newquay, all racing on the four-player cabinet. One of the few good memories we had as a family."
DARREN NICHOLLS
RETRO GAMER PATRON

"The best arcade game of its time and one of the best arcade racers ever made."
MIKE DIVER FREELANCER

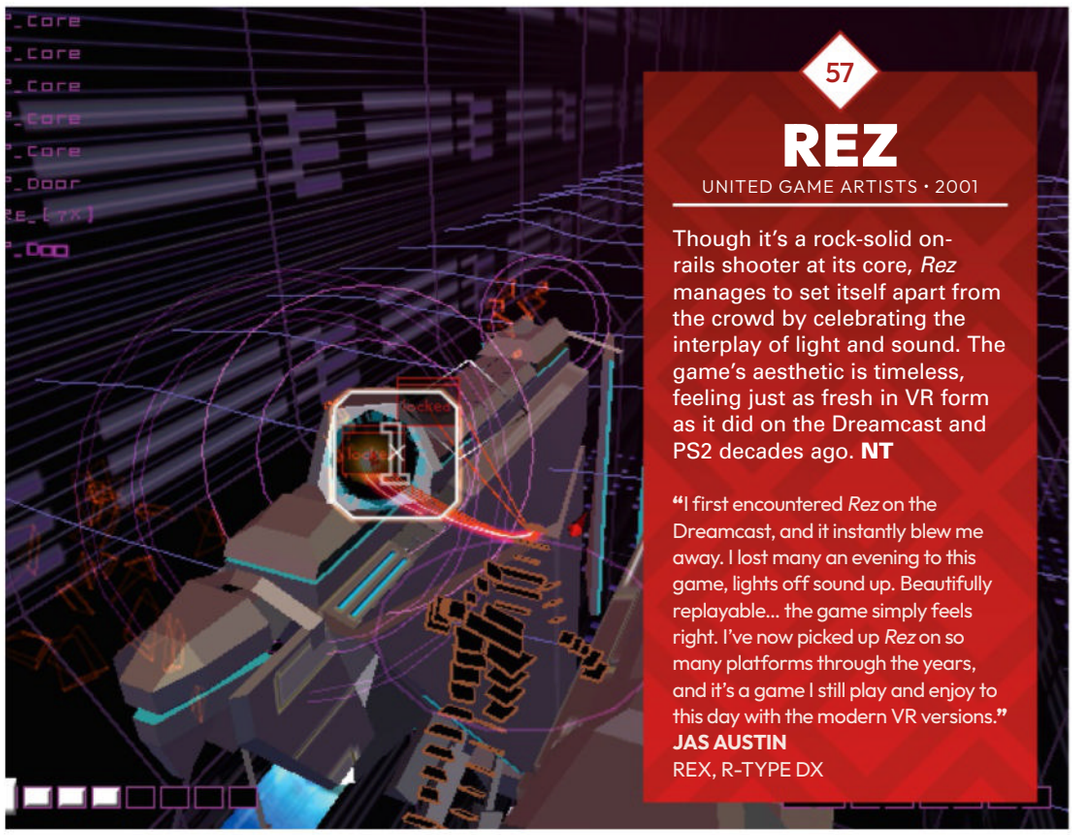
58

CRAZY TAXI

SEGA AM3 • 1999

Crazy Taxi blends racing against the clock with stylish driving to create a genuinely unique experience. The open world contained an entire city with the arcade and Dreamcast versions featuring real places such as Pizza Hut, Kentucky Fried Chicken and Tower Records. It's also memorable for its punk rock soundtrack featuring artists including The Offspring and Bad Religion. **FJ**

"A score-attack game par excellence. I had a Dreamcast in my dorm room but still put money into the cabinet at the pub. I didn't do well at university."
THOMAS ENGLISH
RETRO GAMER PATRON



57

REZ

UNITED GAME ARTISTS • 2001

Though it's a rock-solid on-rails shooter at its core, *Rez* manages to set itself apart from the crowd by celebrating the interplay of light and sound. The game's aesthetic is timeless, feeling just as fresh in VR form as it did on the Dreamcast and PS2 decades ago. **NT**

"I first encountered *Rez* on the Dreamcast, and it instantly blew me away. I lost many an evening to this game, lights off sound up. Beautifully replayable... the game simply feels right. I've now picked up *Rez* on so many platforms through the years, and it's a game I still play and enjoy to this day with the modern VR versions."
JAS AUSTIN
REX, R-TYPE DX

56

PARADROID

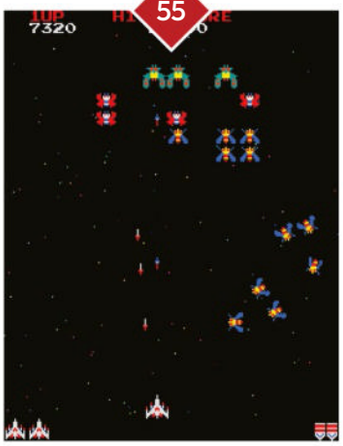
GRAFTGOLD • 1985

Paradroid's appeal is found in its deep strategy. The subgame at its core elevates what would otherwise be a top-down shooter, and it was very sophisticated for its time. Even now, trying to take over superior droids by claiming the most circuits can feel like playing chess. **RM**

"A game that defies description but once you play it it all makes sense."
BILL HARBISON
ARTIST, OCEAN

"A delightful top-down shooting game, where you get to possess other droids. The gameplay mechanics still holds up incredibly well today."
MARTYN HICKS RG PATRON

55



GALAGA

NAMCO • 1981

The fixed shooter format – where the player's ship is locked to a horizontal movement plane – served its most iconic example with 1978's *Space Invaders*. Namco's *Galaga* came three years later, significantly pushing what was expected from fixed shooters. Decades on, with the genre having evolved tremendously, *Galaga* still feels fresh and engrossing to play. **WF**

54

GRAN TURISMO

POLYPHONY DIGIGITAL • 1997

With *Gran Turismo*, Polyphony did the unthinkable. It not only made one of the best racing games to ever grace a console, but also offered staggering attention to detail, a huge roster of cars and many creative racing modes. In doing so, it set a bold new standard for other simulation-based racers to follow. **DG**

"The realism is what I loved about this, it changed the approach for driving games of the future rather than arcade-style go as fast as you can! Also my mate worked for Sony at the time and was involved in the project!"
STEVEN HALL RETRO GAMER PATRON

"It just looked so realistic for its time."
MARTIN EDMONDSON SHADOW OF THE BEAST, DRIVER

53

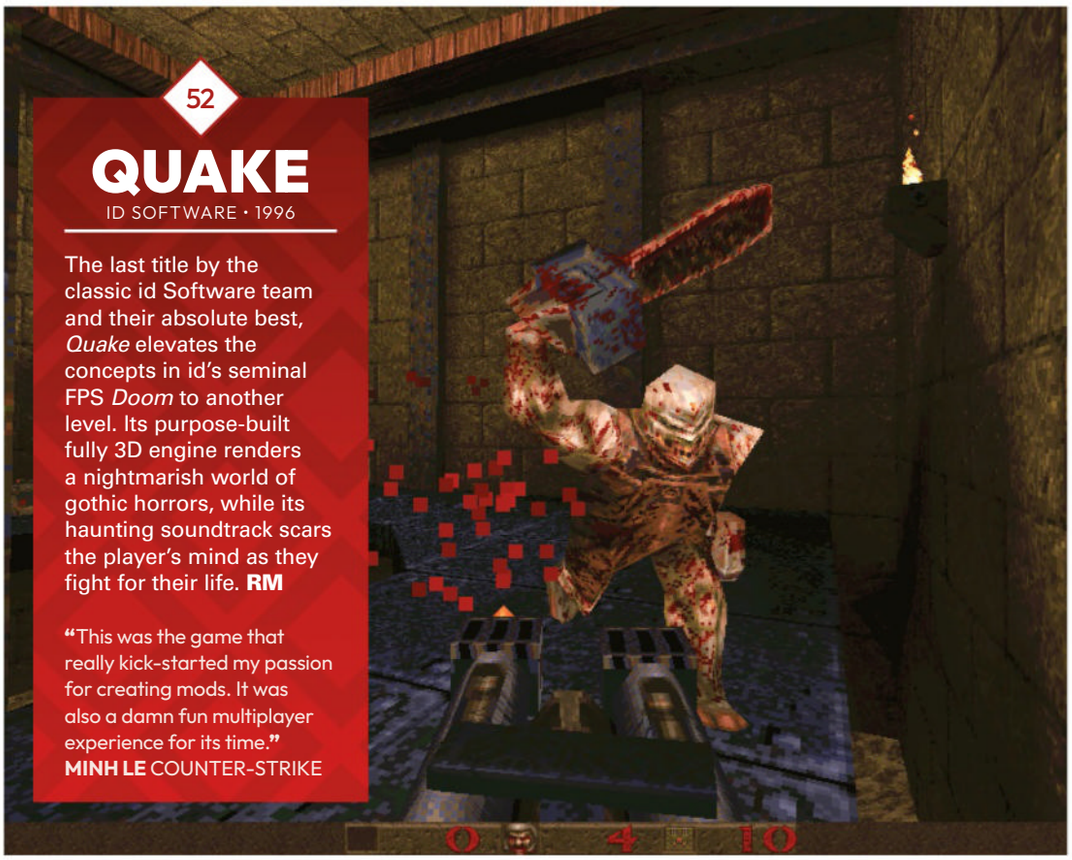
BALDUR'S GATE

BIOWARE • 1998

BioWare's classic CRPG was and remains one of the best examples of how to produce a classic *D&D* campaign within a videogame. Its depth of story, richness of its characters and the sprawling adventure across the Sword Coast is what makes it stand the test of time, like any good *D&D* session with friends. **AB**

"Sublime, even today. Nothing has come close since, despite trying. I still listen to the OST just to relax and de-stress... I defy anyone to play the tavern ambiences and not close their eyes with a smile as they sink back into the past."
CHRIS SEAVOR
CONKER'S BAD FUR DAY

52



QUAKE

ID SOFTWARE • 1996

The last title by the classic id Software team and their absolute best, *Quake* elevates the concepts in id's seminal FPS *Doom* to another level. Its purpose-built fully 3D engine renders a nightmarish world of gothic horrors, while its haunting soundtrack scars the player's mind as they fight for their life. **RM**

"This was the game that really kick-started my passion for creating mods. It was also a damn fun multiplayer experience for its time."
MINH LE COUNTER-STRIKE

51

SONIC ADVENTURE

SONIC TEAM • 1998

It wasn't just the first mainline 3D *Sonic* title, *Sonic Adventure* developed the series further with new gameplay mechanics and voice acting. The speedy gameplay was left intact and was now complemented by some jaw-dropping setpieces. It was also one of the first console games to utilise downloadable content. **FJ**

"*Sonic Adventure* was showcased throughout retailers, having a huge impact on shoppers, thanks to its graphics and 3D gameplay."
GUY MIQUEL-ALBERT
FREELANCER

50

WIPEOUT

PSYGNOSIS • 1995

PlayStation took gaming out of the bedroom. *WipEout* managed to take it clubbing. Published by Psygnosis, this cool classic featured licensed music tracks from the likes of The Chemical Brothers and Orbital along with sophisticated, fast-moving polygonal graphics that felt distinctly grown-up. Taking videogame culture to the masses, players were in ecstasy. **DC**

"There's a reason the E is capitalised. Blissed out Nineties gaming at its zenith." **PAUL DRURY** FREELANCER

49

OUTRUN 2

SEGA AM2 • 2003

Over 20 years on and Sega's sequel remains a permanent fixture of arcades and service stations everywhere. Packed with content (particularly on the home-console releases) and awash with those Sega blue skies and a magnificent soundtrack, the king of drift remains the best arcade racer of the last two decades. **DJ**

"If there's a perfect arcade racing game then it has to be *OutRun 2*." **FRANK MATZKE** MEGA TURRICAN, APIDYA

"A brilliant sequel, stunning visuals and very rewarding to play." **MATT RISLEY** SCOOBY DOO MYSTERY, QUEEN: THE EYE

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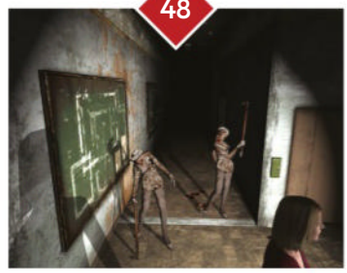


SILENT HILL 2

TEAM SILENT • 2001

The greatest *Silent Hill* game remains in the grimy uppermost echelons of survival horror. Masahiro Ito's grotesque monstrosities are the stuff of nightmares, while the game's tough, hard-hitting narrative remains one of the most mature in videogames. A dark, bleak masterpiece then that may never be bettered. **DJ**

"Working within and despite the slightly ill-fitting template of classic survival horror this is a sad masterpiece." **SAM BARLOW** HER STORY, IMMORTALITY

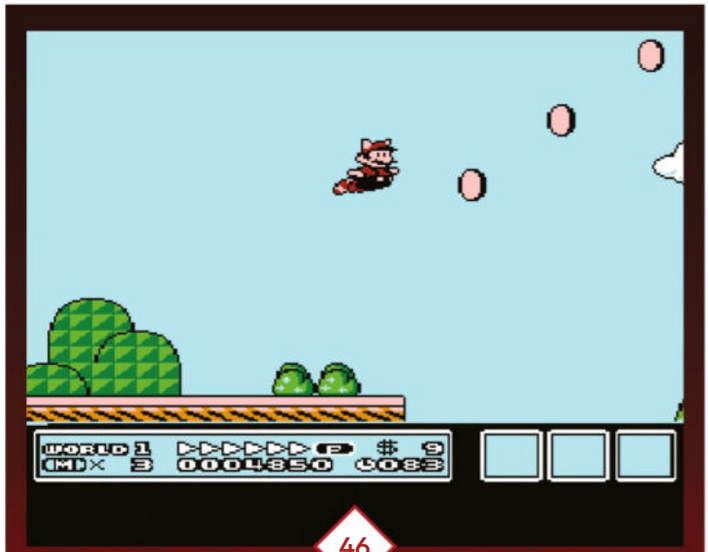
47

GTA: VICE CITY

ROCKSTAR NORTH • 2002

That soundtrack, sunset on Ocean Drive, those iconic Hawaiian shirts; Tommy Vercetti's domination of Vice City and its Eighties-inspired Miami is classic Rockstar at its best. It refined everything that was great about *GTA III*, but ran it through a nostalgic Eighties filter that enhanced those memorable characters, mob movie references and over-the-top violence. **AB**

"Such a fantastic-looking game at that time. The open gameplay showed what videogames could do." **STEPHEN HIGGINS** RG PATRON



46

SUPER MARIO BROS 3

NINTENDO R&D4 • 1988

Among the very best NES titles, *Super Mario Bros 3* improves on the original's level designs and introduces 'Suits' to the series. Raccoon, frog and hammer variants let Mario fly, jump higher and withstand fire. His new skills could have been overwhelming, but masterful tuning makes them intuitive to use. **RM**

"It's the definitive NES game." **ALEXANDER PENN** RG PATRON

45

POKÉMON RED/BLUE

GAME FREAK • 1996

Pokémon was a vital shot in the arm for the ageing Game Boy, and arguably the most sociable offline RPG ever. The game's genius is turning random battles from a chore into an opportunity, with every encounter a chance to bolster your team or gain more cute critters to trade away. **NT**

"It launched a global phenomenon of creature collecting and battling."
MICHAEL WILLIAMS
RETRO GAMER PATRON

44

SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER

SENSIBLE SOFTWARE • 1994

Who would have thought a top-down interpretation of the beautiful sport complete with tiny players would play such a blinder? A game of two halves boasting blistering pace and depth, it also included a manager mode, forming a title that continues to have countless fans new and old. **DC**

"Out of the many masterpieces we played on the Amiga and A1200, this was our most played game, and quite rightly so."
MARTYN HICKS
RETRO GAMER PATRON

"The best game depiction of mankind's biggest game."
ROGIER VAN KRALINGEN
RETRO GAMER PATRON

43

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

SONIC TEAM • 1992

Where *Sonic The Hedgehog* was an extremely good platformer, *Sonic 2* would go on to become the stuff of gaming legend. Bigger, better, faster, and featuring a truly unforgettable soundtrack, it propelled Sega, along with its Mega Drive, into stardom, marking the beginning of the real 16-bit console wars. It's also notable for Sonic 2sday an event that saw the game receiving a synchronous release in the West, which was incredibly unusual at the time. **DG**

42

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

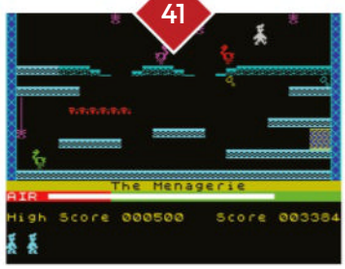
KONAMI • 1997

Konami's sequel to *Castlevania: Rondo No Blood* got so much right. Packed with exquisite detail, it oozed atmosphere, and brought sublime action defined by its thrilling pace and deft, dynamic combat. What's more, *Symphony Of The Night* sounded as good as it looked, and was pivotally pioneering in forwarding the Metroidvania template. **WF**

"The classic standard."
ARA SHIRINIAN
EPIC MICKEY: POWER OF ILLUSION

"In an era of polygons and 3D, this for me is the most impressive game of the 32-bit era."
GLENN HIGGINS RG PATRON

41



MANIC MINER

MATTHEW SMITH • 1983

Revolutionary and all-conquering in its day, Matthew Smith's inspired platformer is still an object exercise in compelling gameplay. Crammed full of cheerful lunacy in terms of Willy's opponents, *Manic Miner*'s vibrant levels are unforgiving until you crack them, which of course spurs you on to beat the next. **RM**

"I was torn between this and *Jet Set Willy* but I think the linearity gave it the edge. I've lost count of how many times I've played through Central Cavern."
STEVE ELLIS
GOLDENEYE 007, TIMESPLITTERS

40

SPACE HARRIER

SEGA R&D1 • 1985

A masterpiece on multiple levels, Yu Suzuki's *Space Harrier* also broke new ground with every turn. Its sprite-scaling tech had previously powered Suzuki's *Hang-On*, but his surreal shooter uses it to render wildly imaginative sci-fi visuals. Of special note is the deluxe version's motion simulator cabinet. **RM**

"Still the game I go to if I want a pure hit of sensation. Speed, flight, zapping. A man in a red jacket and jeans takes on a galaxy of prog rock space invaders."
SAM BARLOW
HER STORY, IMMORTALITY

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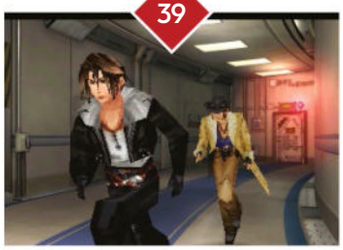


FINAL FANTASY VIII

SQUARESOFT • 1999

Square went in a bold direction with this hotly anticipated RPG, introducing the new Junction and Draw systems for magic and opting for a more realistic visual style. Those changes may have been divisive, but the lavish production values and memorable cast ensure that it picked up plenty of fans. **NT**

"I obviously like *Final Fantasy VII* but *Final Fantasy VIII* was the first one I played, and completed. In my head I have distinct memories linking *Final Fantasy VIII* and Papa Roach's *Infest* album. Just playing and listening in my room."
AJ GRAND-SCRUTTON
BATTLETOADS, THE ESCAPISTS

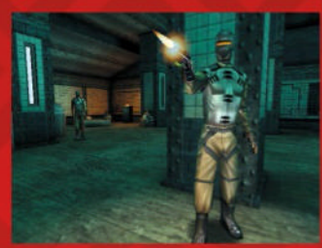
38

DEUS EX

ION STORM • 2000

It wasn't just that *Deus Ex* empowered players with the freedom to turn their version of JC Denton into a character befitting their own playstyle, but the fact that it all fit together into a deep, dark and well-released cyberpunk world helped to draw players into its narrative as much as its immersive gameplay. **AB**

"This was the first game to really nail the cyberpunk theme. It also had a really engaging narrative." **MINH LE** COUNTER-STRIKE



37

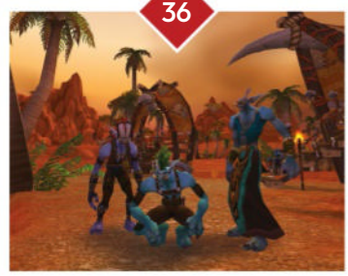
STREETS OF RAGE 2

SEGA CS2 • 1993

The first *Streets Of Rage* was Sega's valiant effort to go 12 rounds against Capcom's *Final Fight* beat-'em-up juggernaut. It was the game's sequel though, released one year later, that gave it a true run for its money, thanks to its outstanding graphics, great multiplayer, and one of Yuzo Koshiro's best soundtracks! **PK**

"It took me years to completely dissect the intricacies of the moves and throws *Streets Of Rage 2* offers."
DANNY NELEMAN
RETRO GAMER PATRON

36



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT • 2004

At its peak *WOW* was played by 12 million people monthly, it made the leap into broader pop culture and has been a touchstone for every other MMO released ever since. But arguably more importantly, it's been the foundation for countless friendships, competitive guilds and even fostered more than one marriage. **AB**

"It pioneered the MMO, virtual currency and virtual items and triggered the massive growth of videogaming in China."
TRIP HAWKINS
FOUNDER, ELECTRONIC ARTS

"An MMORPG for the masses."
TELESPIEL TOBI
RETRO GAMER PATRON

35

ASTEROIDS

ATARI INC • 1979

Although far from the first vector coin-op, *Asteroids* was the first to rule the arcades. It's unusual for a fixed shoot-'em-up, in that it lets you fly your ship in any direction that you rotate it to face. Its equally novel objective is to shoot space rocks into bits while avoiding getting crushed. **RM**

"The golden age of arcade games! Every arcade had to have it."
DAVID PERRY
COOL SPOT, EARTHWORM JIM

"The epitome of arcade action."
RICHARD SPITALNY
FOUNDER, FIRST STAR SOFTWARE

34

FINAL FANTASY VII

SQUARESOFT • 1997

Square's RPG was enormously influential in its cinematic approach to videogame storytelling, with big emotional hits and a tale of corporate greed at the expense of the planet that feels as relevant as ever today. However, the likeable cast and varied side activities ensure that it's not all doom and gloom. **NT**

"Elevated RPGs to new heights with cinematic storytelling, memorable characters, and groundbreaking graphics. It set the standard for narrative-driven role-playing games and remains a classic in the genre, inspiring future RPG titles." **MICHAEL WILLIAMS** RG PATRON

33

LEMMINGS

DMA DESIGN • 1991

Apparently, lemmings have a primal urge to kill themselves – and that made-up Disney fact provided the perfect premise for DMA Design's delightful original puzzler. Highly ported and surprisingly addictive, this endearing game looked basic and initially appeared simple to play. But saving those rodents required much strategic thought and surprisingly fast reflexes. **DC**

"Cathartic and utterly compelling, whether I'm playing or watching."
TIM FITCHES
RETRO GAMER PATRON

"Definitely still one of the best puzzle games in gaming!"
DOUGLAS WILSON
RETRO GAMER PATRON

32

GAUNTLET

ATARI GAMES • 1985

One of the earliest four-player co-ops, Atari's epic dungeon crawler challenges up to four friends to take on demon hordes in a heroic quest. Its shoot-'em-up aspect is enhanced by the need to explore and build-up your characters, and by unintentionally funny speech samples like, "Wizard needs food badly!" **RM**

"A friend visited the USA and came back to tell me about a game where four players could play at once – working together but each having their own score. It sounded amazing – I waited four months to see it and it did not disappoint. Atari at its very best."
ALEX WARD
BURNOUT 3, BLACK

31

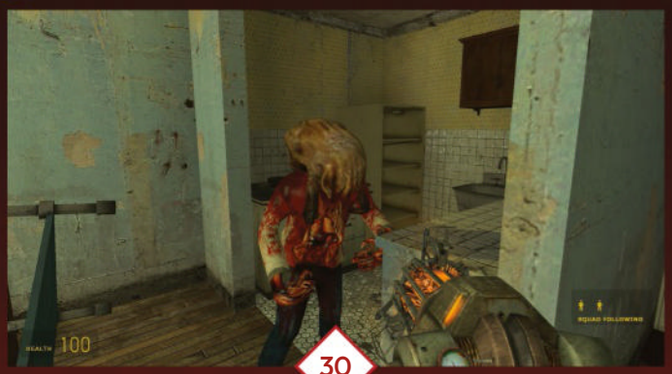
DEFENDER

WILLIAMS ELECTRONICS • 1981

Unlike any shooter that came before it, *Defender* boasts bi-directional scrolling and six enemy types with distinct attacks. In a clever twist, one evolves from abducted astronauts that you fail to save from your enemies, making saves as important as blasting foes while not crashing your insanely fast ship. **RM**

"The speed, the noise and the rescue mission kept us coming back."
ANDREW BRAYBROOK
URIDIUM, GRIBBLY'S DAY OUT

"Alien mayhem + gratuitous explosions = my fave space shooter."
EUGENE JARVIS
DEFENDER, ROBOTRON: 2084



30

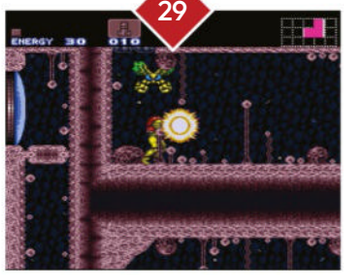
HALF-LIFE 2

VALVE SOFTWARE • 2004

Half-Life is considered one of the forefathers of the 'thinking man's shooter' – and its 2004 sequel took everything that made the original great and turned it up to amazing: presentation, story, gunplay and multiplayer were and still are top-notch. Also *Half-Life 2* was the first true trial by fire for Valve's now ubiquitous Steam platform. **PK**

"Not only one of the best and most influential FPSes of all time, but one of the best games of all time in general." **KARL BOURKE** RG PATRON

"As an FPS I still think this has never been bettered. Great story and great weapons." **GLENN HIGGINS** RETRO GAMER PATRON



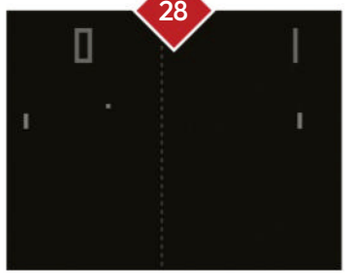
29

SUPER METROID

NINTENDO R&D1/INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS • 1994

Building on the strong foundation of the NES original, *Super Metroid* offers a non-linear world that gradually opens up as Samus gains new abilities. The oppressive atmosphere and top-quality level design make this one of the very finest games of its type, often imitated and very rarely matched. **NT**

"A defining game and genre was created with this game, forever changing how we mesh world, level design and mechanics."
TIM LONGO
STAR WARS: STARFIGHTER



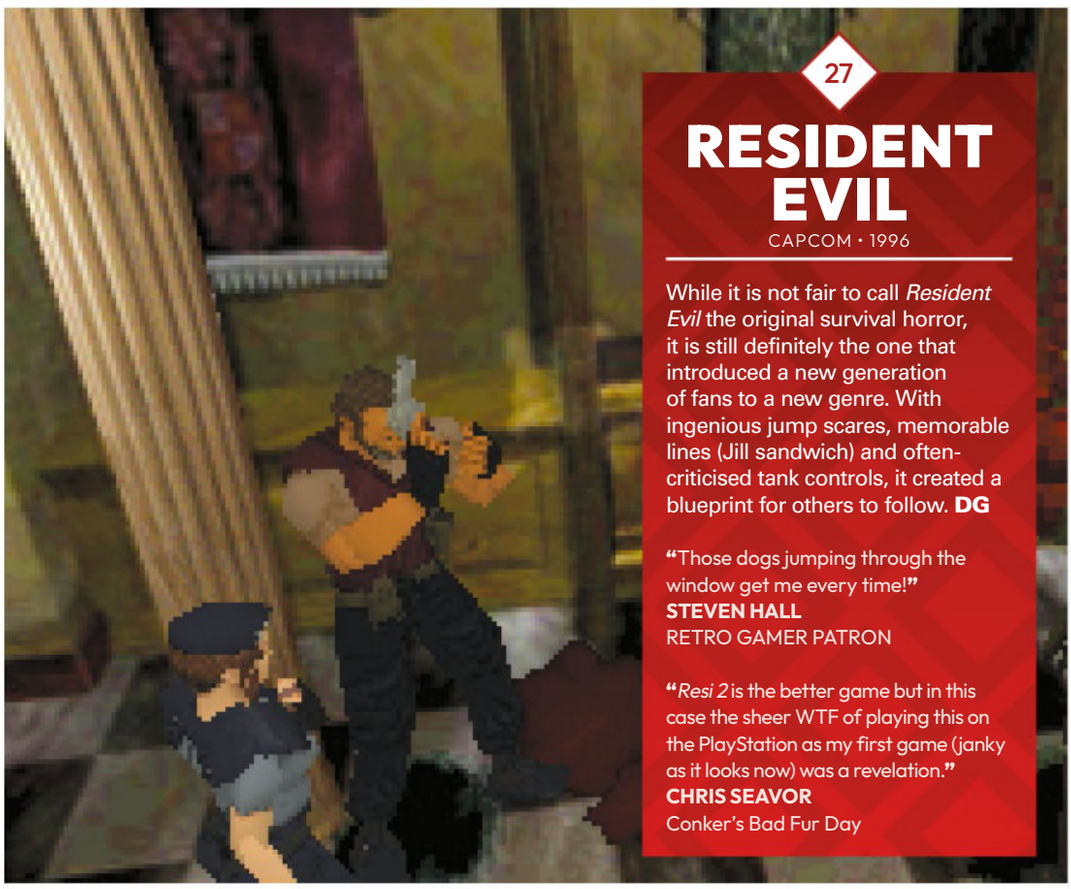
28

PONG

ATARI INC • 1972

As one of the earliest commercially successful videogames, *Pong*'s position as a gaming legend cannot be overstated despite the legal wranglings that followed. *Pong*'s singular gameplay – players hit the ball until someone misses – endeared it to a vast audience. It remains one of the most accessible and compulsive two-player games of all time. **GM**

"This game invented the industry of arcade coin-op videogames, and its port became the killer app of the Atari 2600."
KARL
RETRO GAMER PATRON



27

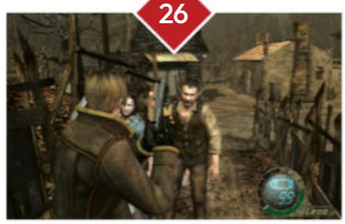
RESIDENT EVIL

CAPCOM • 1996

While it is not fair to call *Resident Evil* the original survival horror, it is still definitely the one that introduced a new generation of fans to a new genre. With ingenious jump scares, memorable lines (Jill sandwich) and often-criticised tank controls, it created a blueprint for others to follow. **DG**

"Those dogs jumping through the window get me every time!"
STEVEN HALL
RETRO GAMER PATRON

"*Resi 2* is the better game but in this case the sheer WTF of playing this on the PlayStation as my first game (janky as it looks now) was a revelation."
CHRIS SEAVOR
Conker's Bad Fur Day



26

RESIDENT EVIL 4

CAPCOM • 2005

Capcom rebooted – and revitalised – its famous survival horror series with this fourth entry in 2004. More action-orientated than its predecessors, *Resident Evil 4* eschews puzzles and tank controls for a fluid and modern experience as cop Leon Kennedy investigates the disappearance of the president's daughter in the rural backwaters of Europe. **GM**

"I remember importing the demo from Japan, then the US version and then buying the Europe version bundled with a *Resident Evil 4* GameCube. Such an exciting game when it was released and still excellent to play today."
STEPHEN HIGGINS
RETRO GAMER PATRON

25

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

LUCASFILM GAMES • 1990

The simple story of how the bright-eyed, but not very bright, Guybrush Threepwood wanted to be a pirate, started a classic series of point-and-click adventure games still alive in many fans' hearts. Through duels with insults and clever humour, this adventure shines strong many years later. **DG**

"Invented the 'don't learn by dying' in adventures, and what a great sense of humour and novelty!"
TOM HALL
COMMANDER KEEN, DOOM

"A great point-and click game that's fondly remembered thanks to its great puzzles and sense of humour."
ALIX BERGERET
RETRO GAMER PATRON

24

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

DMA DESIGN • 2001

Switching away from a flat aerial view to 3D polygonal graphics, the third main entry in this controversial crime-centric series brought Liberty City to life. Providing an immersive playground that allowed gamers to indulge their darker side, this timeless tale revolutionised open-world gaming while reopening the debate over violent videogames. **DC**

"The first time I really understood sandbox games. I spent ages getting frustrated, driving to a location, getting out of a car and trying to shoot the bad guy. Failed over and over. Eventually I just rammed my car into his, causing him to be crushed by it. Wow. Anything is possible here."
JASON PAGE
SOUND DESIGN, GRAFTGOLD

23

HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED

BUNGIE • 2001

Bungie's *Halo* would go on to redefine the FPS genre like so many shooters before it. Its shield and two-weapon system is still utilised within the genre today, while its multiplayer mechanics have also gone on to create templates that are still widely in use, particularly on consoles. Epic storytelling and challenging enemy AI cemented *Halo*'s status as an essential Xbox game. **DJ**

"The only FPS I've ever got on with, largely thanks to the excellent multiplayer, but also the glorious weapons, controls and level design."
TIM FITCHES
RETRO GAMER PATRON

22

R-TYPE

IREM • 1987

By the late-Eighties shmup devs were focussing ever more on pushing speed and bullet count. And then there was *R-Type*; a 2D shooter that pursued atmosphere, claustrophobic level design over spiralling bullet counts, and the feeling of venturing into realms unknown. It was still tough and authentic, but delightfully different. **WF**

"The best arcade shooter of all time."
CHRIS HUELSBECK MUSICIAN, TURRICAN II, APIDYA

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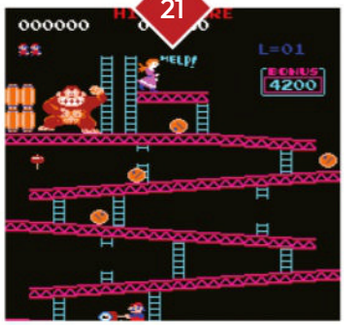


DONKEY KONG

NINTENDO R&D1 • 1981

Before *Donkey Kong*, game characters required ladders to move about platforms. But with the introduction of Jumpman, the platform genre as we know it today came to life. It was also an early example of storytelling in videogames and remains hotly contested by high-score seekers. **FJ**

"Sure the arcade version is iconic and timeless, but it was the LCD handheld that ushered in affordability and portability, as well as multi-screens."
GASSI THE CAT
RETRO GAMER PATRON

20

TOMB RAIDER

CORE DESIGN • 1996

Few videogame characters captured the zeitgeist like Lara Croft. While the advertising for later games would spend more focus on her wardrobe and sexuality, it's important to remember the sheer impact Lara's first adventure made. Despite debuting on Sega's Saturn, Lara's success became intertwined with Sony's PlayStation and her dramatic escapades around the world instantly proved a hit with gamers. Yes there's a clunkiness to Lara's first adventure that's been obliterated from modern *Tomb Raider* games, but for all their visual splendour and slick controls they lack the sheer scale and sense of exploring that made Lara's earlier adventure feel so fun and epic. **DJ**

"Featuring some of the best designed levels in videogame history, there was so much more to *Tomb Raider* than Ms Croft and her pneumatic figure." **MARTYN CARROLL** FREELANCER

"It was the first 3D game I played and it blew me away. From dinosaurs, Greek and Roman myths, and architecture to Egyptian tombs, I didn't know what to expect each time a new level loaded up. The sense of wonder with that first game was something else." **SEAMUS KAVANAGH** RETRO GAMER PATRON

"Defined the action adventure genre with a great main character who became an icon in her own right!" **STEVEN HALL** RETRO GAMER PATRON

19

SHENMUE II

SEGA AM2 • 2001

While the first impression that *Shenmue*'s technological prowess made was impossible to repeat, *Shenmue II* is a highly memorable adventure in its own right. Where the first step on Ryo Hazuki's road of revenge took place in the comfortable surroundings of his home town, his adventures in Hong Kong carry a tangible sense of danger and his heroic inclinations quickly land him in trouble. Before long he's confronting gangs, gambling on street corners and getting involved in the underground fighting scene, with allies like Ren that you're never sure are entirely on your side. Despite the balance of gameplay emphasising action and thrilling setpieces over slow-paced investigation, the more contemplative aspects of *Shenmue* have been retained, as those who have experienced Ryo's long walk with Shenhua will attest. Allow yourself to get lost in *Shenmue II,* and you'll never forget it. **NT**

"Expansive and sprawling where the first was cosy and homely. An ambitious sequel that expanded on the original while losing none of the magic or charm." **TIM FITCHES** RETRO GAMER PATRON

"The most immersive open-world game created and way ahead of its time." **JAMES STONE** RETRO GAMER PATRON

18

OUT RUN

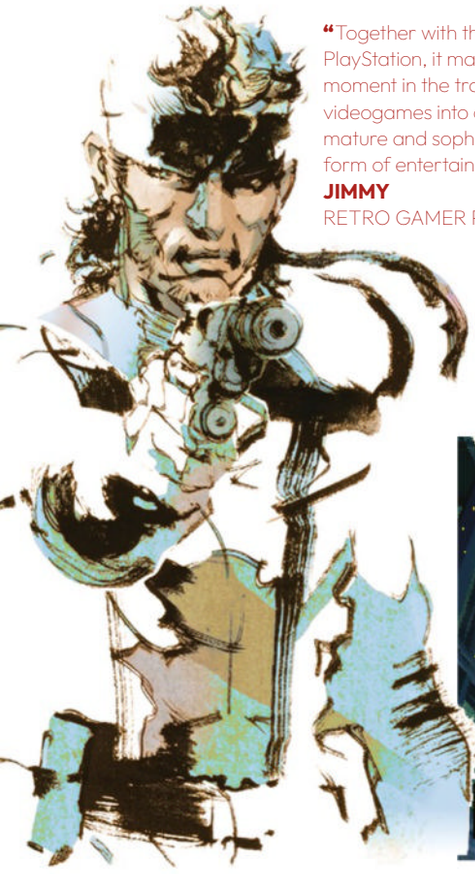
SEGA • 1986

The arcade racer was well established before Yu Suzuki's *Out Run* came along, but it still managed to forge its own path in the overcrowded genre. In addition to its cutting-edge 'super scaler' technology, the real impact of *Out Run* was its enchanting soundtrack. Arcade games just didn't sound like this in 1986 and it's somewhat telling that when people do talk about Yu Suzuki's game its aesthetics are mentioned long before its gameplay. And yet for all its visual and aural splendour there's still much to enjoy, thanks to *Out Run*'s solid racing mechanics and a focus that's as much on the destination as it is the journey. **DJ**

"A game that still makes my face light up. It STILL looks good to me, it STILL plays well. I still love the music. Possibly has had more influence on my entire adult life than anything else."
ALEX WARD BURNOUT 3, BLACK

"An industry game-changer, stunning visuals and addictive music, *Out Run* has stood the test of time!"
MATT RISLEY QUEEN: THE EYE

"Just exhilarating in the arcades and sounded amazing too. It's also had some good console conversions over the years."
IAN DARBY RG PATRON



"Together with the PlayStation, it marks a pivotal moment in the transition of videogames into a more mature and sophisticated form of entertainment."
JIMMY
RETRO GAMER PATRON

"A cinematic experience like no other, on a platform that shouldn't be able to handle it, combined with refined stealth action gameplay like nothing else."
TIM LONGO STAR WARS: STARFIGHTER, HALO: INFINITE

17

METAL GEAR SOLID

KONAMI • 1998

While everyone raves about Mario and Link's first 3D adventures, Solid Snake's 3D debut was no less impressive. Hideo Kojima had already made several 2D games in the series and he threw everything into the iconic character's PlayStation debut. Story-wise it's on another level to many similar games, thanks in no small part to its talented voice cast. Then there's its stealth mechanics which are every bit as good as those found in *Thief: The Dark Project*, which debuted a few months later. Filled with slick game mechanics and an overwhelming focus on smart, action-orientated setpieces, *Metal Gear Solid* set a blueprint for all other console stealth games to follow. **DJ**

"Kojima's masterpiece seemed an impossible leap in immersive depth and quality that none of the rest of us could follow or achieve."
TRIP HAWKINS FOUNDER, ELECTRONIC ARTS

16

SUPER MARIO KART

NINTENDO EAD • 1992

This iconic game started development as an *F-Zero* sequel, and as nice as that would have been, it's hard to imagine a world without *Super Mario Kart*. Using the Mode 7 graphics of the SNES to deliver wacky racing in a way other platforms simply couldn't, *Super Mario Kart* allowed the inhabitants of the Mushroom Kingdom to let loose on each other with banana peels and Koopa shells in an anything-goes scramble for the chequered flag. Despite the chaos, racing purists generally prefer this first instalment in the series for its more restrained set of power-ups, devoid of the Blue Shells that punish success and Bullet Bills that rescue awful performances. The influence of *Super Mario Kart* is undeniable – as well as its own massively successful sequels, the game inspired the likes of *Street Racer*, *Sonic Drift* and *WipEout* to varying degrees. What's more, it set the template for future *Mario* spin-off series including *Mario Tennis*, *Mario Golf* and *Mario Party*. That's a heck of a legacy. **NT**

"I still remember my parents asking why my brother was so excited to get a second controller for his birthday. Because Battle Mode!" **THOMAS ENGLISH** RETRO GAMER PATRON

"The friendship-destroying tradition of couch gaming started here." **ANDREA ROLLA** RETRO GAMER PATRON

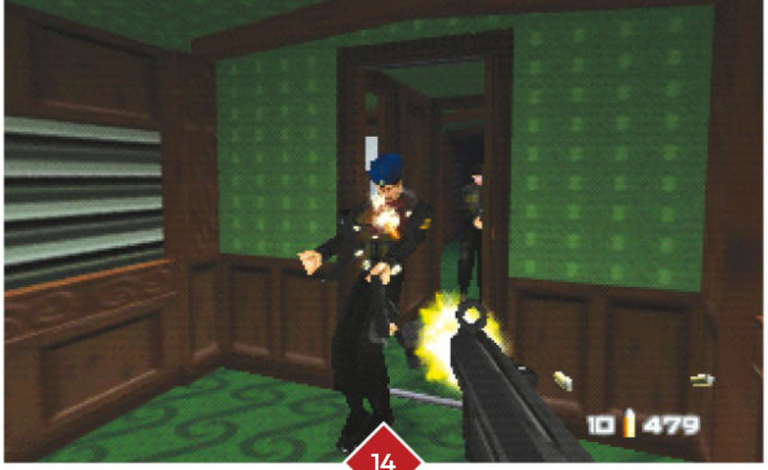
15

HALF-LIFE

VALVE • 1998

From the moment Valve's debut game starts, it's obvious that *Half-Life* isn't going to be a conventional first-person shooter. Your protagonist Gordon Freeman might not utter a word during his very bad day at the office, but that doesn't stop *Half-Life* from being an absorbing, story-driven adventure. The game's many scripted setpieces distance it from other shooters of the period, while its inventive approach to puzzles highlighted that both brains and dexterity were needed to reach *Half-Life*'s dramatic ending. *Half-Life*'s world-building always feels convincing, while its imperilled scientists and security guards offer some much-needed comic relief. And yet there's more to *Half-Life* than just its excellent story. Mechanically it's monstrously rich with a satisfying amount of weaponry to exploit, a range of truly challenging enemies to takedown or avoid and some thrilling multiplayer battles. The end result is one hell of a calling card. **DJ**

"*Half-Life* not only set the standard for story-driven first-person shooters, but gave a glimpse of how AAA videogames have evolved in a relatively short time. The production values matched those of Hollywood productions and would spawn mods that became huge franchises themselves like *Portal* and *Counter-strike*." **DANNY NELEMAN** RETRO GAMER PATRON



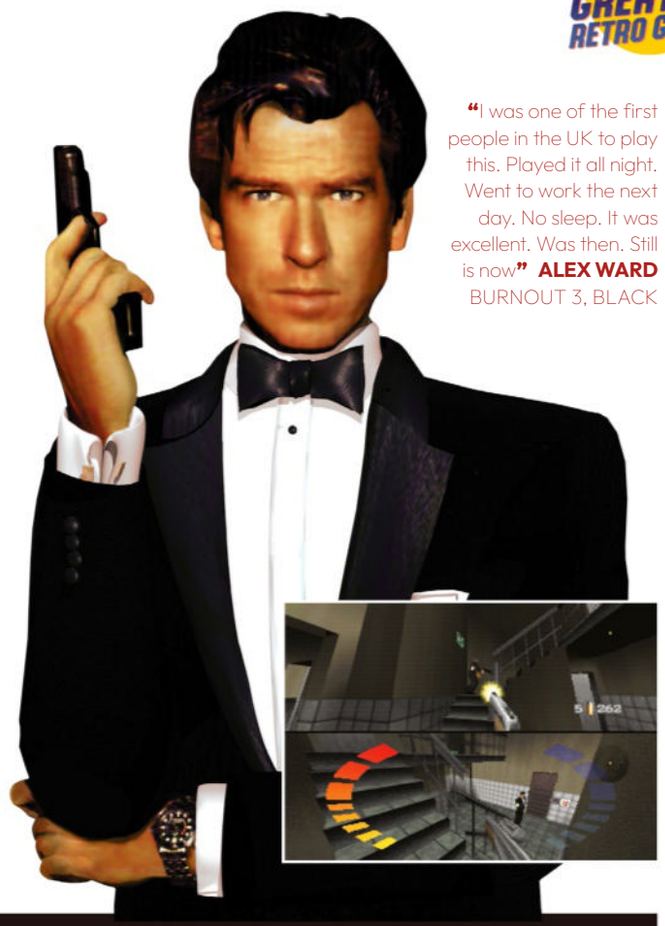
14

GOLDENEYE 007

RARE • 1997

Conventional wisdom suggests that releasing a licensed game almost two years after the film it was based on would be a bad idea, but when you've got a game like *GoldenEye 007*, conventional wisdom doesn't matter. First-person shooters were still relatively new to console players in 1997 so something merely well-constructed would have done, but Rare came out with something revolutionary. Rather than just blasting your way to a goal, you had to achieve set objectives – and when the difficulty increased, you got more tasks to complete rather than just more durable enemies. Of course, that's just the brilliant solo campaign. LAN party veterans may protest, but the ease of setting up a Nintendo 64 with four controllers did plenty to popularise multiplayer shooters, and with modes like Slappers Only and amusing cheats like Big Head Mode, it was no second-rate experience. **NT**

"Rare's spy FPS aided the genre to work well on consoles. You really felt like Bond as you traversed through the missions. The multiplayer function also helped the title's legendary status!" **DOUGLAS WILSON** RETRO GAMER PATRON



"I was one of the first people in the UK to play this. Played it all night. Went to work the next day. No sleep. It was excellent. Was then. Still is now" **ALEX WARD** BURNOUT 3, BLACK

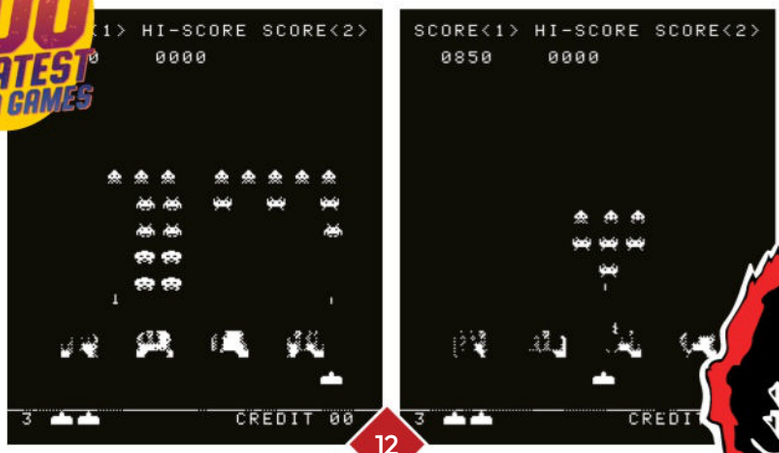
13

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

SONIC TEAM • 1991

Developed to provide Sega with a mascot to rival Mario and highlight the power of the Mega Drive, *Sonic The Hedgehog* almost single-handedly launched the company to previously unimaginable heights. With Naoto Ohshima's appealing character design, some of the best graphics yet seen in a home-console game, unmatched speed and tunes by J-pop composer Masato Nakamura, *Sonic* was certainly a feast for the senses. It was also simple to grasp thanks to a one-button control scheme, but it was far from superficial. The substance was found in the level designs – creations with various alternative routes above and below the well-worn paths, encouraged players to use their knowledge of level layouts and mastery of the game's physics to find optimal routes. In many ways, *Sonic* was tailored to the speedrunning mentality long before the modern community was established. A wave of copycat animal mascot platformers followed, but these strong foundations ensured Sonic would outlast them. **NT**

"An important game in advancement of arcade action gaming." **RICHARD SPITALNY** FOUNDER, FIRST STAR SOFTWARE

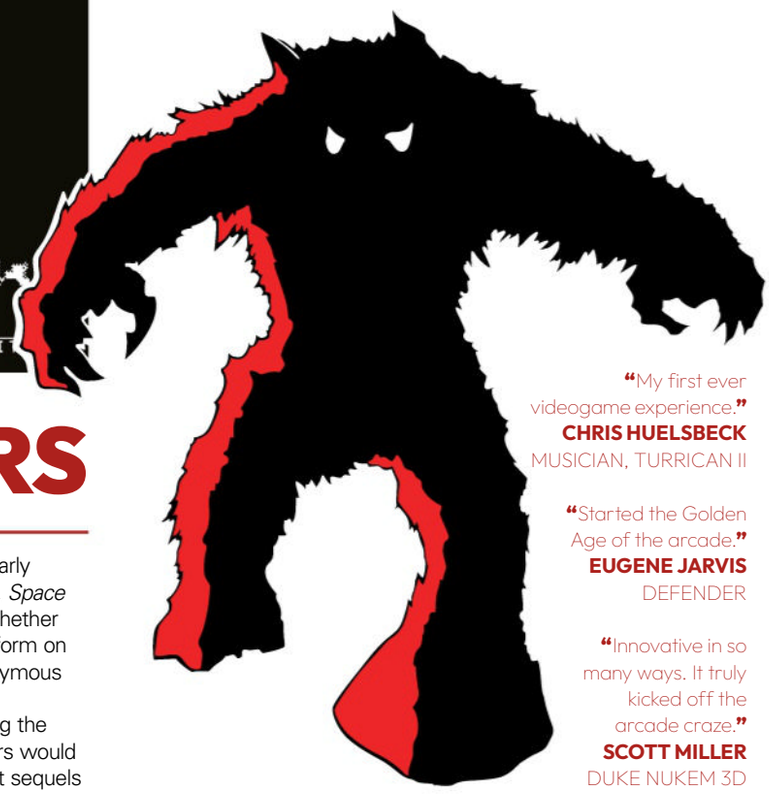


12

SPACE INVADERS

TAITO • 1978

The dominance of Taito's game in arcades during the late-Seventies and early Eighties was as relentless as the game's invading enemies. Like *Pac-Man*, *Space Invaders* seemed to be everywhere during the halcyon days of gaming, whether it was mesmerising arcade goers on a seaside pier or turning up in clone form on various home micros. Its instantly recognisable aliens have become synonymous as a representation of videogames, while its core gameplay has remained consistent for the last four decades. Taito's game is instrumental in defining the shoot-'em-up genre and created a formula that the company's arcade peers would happily copy and adapt. Like *Pac-Man* it's been superseded by many great sequels (*Space Invaders Extreme* and *Space Invaders: Infinity Gene* to name just two) but it remains completely compelling to play in its original form. A poster child for videogame pop culture, *Space Invaders*' influence extends far beyond the boundary of videogames. It's an astonishingly important release. **DJ**



"My first ever videogame experience." **CHRIS HUELSBECK** MUSICIAN, TURRICAN II

"Started the Golden Age of the arcade." **EUGENE JARVIS** DEFENDER

"Innovative in so many ways. It truly kicked off the arcade craze." **SCOTT MILLER** DUKE NUKEM 3D

"The second game we played in the sixth form. Still monochrome but with a painted backdrop. Very simplistic and a great challenge." **ANDREW BRAYBROOK** URIDIUM

"Such good memories of this, from the opening of sneaking into the castle in the rain to finding the Master Sword in the forest. A magical game." **ANDY DAVIDSON** WORMS, WORMS 2

"*Zelda: A Link To The Past* took the foundation of its first instalment to a next level with absolutely astonishing pixel art, great story and brilliant gameplay, which even later instalments couldn't live up to. Even today it is an adventure not to be missed!" **ROB** RG PATRON

"Inspired so much of my game design approach during the late-Nineties and early 2000s. A lot of this wonderfully constructed game is in *Shadow Man*." **SIMON PHIPPS** RICK DANGEROUS

11

ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

NINTENDO EAD • 1991

After a divisive second outing, Nintendo went back to the template that underpinned Link's first NES adventure, added a new layer of 16-bit shine and refined it to perfection. Many of Link's iconic abilities are introduced here, and you'll be hooked from the dramatic introduction, through your first trip into the Dark World, and right up to the final showdown with Ganon. **NT**

"My first dive into the realms of Hyrule and still holds a special place in my gaming memory palace. *Ocarina* may be the slightly better game, but nothing quite comes close to the 16-bit comfort pillow of the SNES classic." **CHRIS SEAVOR** CONKER'S BAD FUR DAY

"A sublime game in every way, the ultimate top-down action adventure." **MARTYN HICKS** RG PATRON

10

SUPER MARIO WORLD

NINTENDO EAD • 1990

This highly refined platformer is the culmination of everything the *Mario* team had learned in just five years since *Super Mario Bros*. Whether you were hunting for secret exits or returning to levels to see how the latest Switch Palace had changed things up, flying around with the cape or munching enemies with Yoshi, *Super Mario World* felt like the grandest adventure imaginable and ushered the SNES in with a bang. **NT**

"Set a bar for mechanics and level design coming together with perfection." **TIM LONGO** STAR WARS: STARFIGHTER,

"I just spent so much of my time playing this one game. I was probably the first person to finish it outside of Nintendo's internal game testers, since we were working with Nintendo on the Super FX chip at the time and they gave us an early Super Famicom, plus only one game – *Super Mario World*. Took me a while to realise when I finished the 96th level that there weren't four extra missing ones. For a while I didn't believe I had finished it." **JEZ SAN** STARGLIDER

"I played *Super Mario World* for a solid year, getting to 100% and I loved every moment of it." **MIKE DAILLY** LEMMINGS

"My first *Mario* game, and it really showed how much better Nintendo were at platformers. You simply had to play it until you'd found and completed everything." **ANDY DAVIDSON** WORMS, WORMS 2

9

SHENMUE

SEGA AM2 • 1999

Tales of martial artists seeking vengeance are common in videogames, but *Shenmue* is distinguished by its cinematic aspirations and ambitious world simulation. Yokosuka is one of the very first videogame locations to feel like a functioning town, a quiet little place where a murder at the Hazuki household would genuinely be shocking – a feeling reflected in the game's leisurely pace, which allows Ryo to pursue his mystery or simply hang out in the arcade. Few games have ever matched Yu Suzuki's magnum opus for that initial wow factor. **NT**

"Its scope was epic, it pioneered the 'real' open-world genre, its influence can be felt throughout the *Yakuza* series as well as games such as *Headhunter* and the later *GTA* series." **KARA JANE ADAMS** RETRO GAMER PATRON

"I was going to put *Grand Theft Auto III* instead as a first open-world experience. But I was a Sega kid and longed to visit Japan, so this was the game for me." **GLENN HIGGINS** RETRO GAMER PATRON

"The scope of detail when looking closely at items and objects in the game world. The feeling of truly arcade-like graphics playing at home. The feeling of everything happening in real time, from weather changes to people's daily life interactions. Beautiful music." **PAUL WALBERG** RETRO GAMER PATRON

"Any game that can inspire grown adults to go on pilgrimages has gotta be considered pretty influential. This was open-world gaming before the genre even existed." **TIM FITCHES** RETRO GAMER PATRON

8

SUPER MARIO BROS

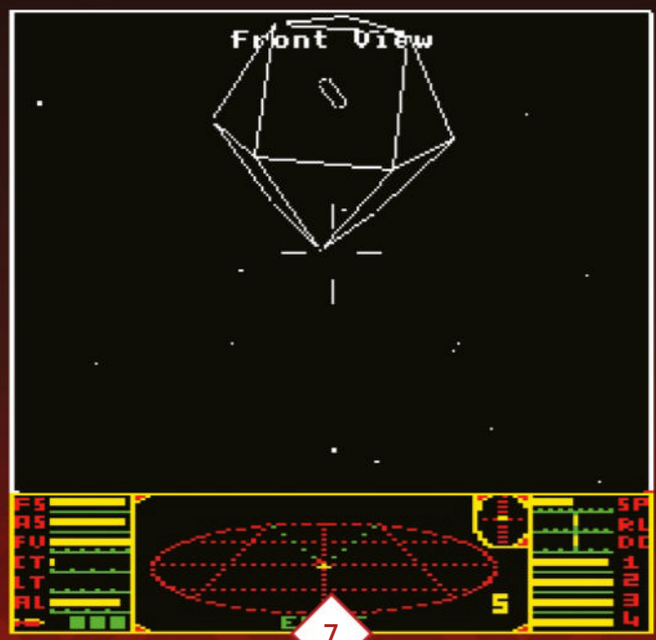
NINTENDO R&D4 • 1985

Nintendo may have relied on ROB to woo an American audience that was wary of videogames, but the magic of Mario ultimately convinced people to buy into the NES. It's easy to see why – the bright graphics and appealing music draw players in, the easily understood controls engage them quickly and a considerable challenge keeps them hooked. The familiar pipes and Koopas of *Mario Bros* returned, as did Mario's signature attack of punching the platforms above him as he jumps, but the scope of the game was expanded to a degree scarcely imaginable at the time.

The developers managed to pack an astonishing variety of enemies and stages into just 32KB of ROM, and the game is packed with genius design, from the much discussed wordless tutorial of the first stage to Mario's perfect feeling of weight and momentum. That's not to mention the wealth of secrets, including the astonishing way that the curiosity of players was anticipated and rewarded with Warp Zones. *Super Mario Bros* really is just amazing on every level. **NT**

"The fact that [Nintendo] had saved the industry as a whole and how popular Mario still is today is why I consider this game the most influential videogame of all time." **ZAHIR HASSAN** RETRO GAMER PATRON

"One of the purest gaming experiences and the single most influential platformer of all time." **KARA JANE ADAMS** RETRO GAMER PATRON



7

ELITE

DAVID BRABEN/IAN BELL • 1984

Elite's impact on home gaming was seismic. While many developers were content to recreate arcade games, play around with platformers or design in-depth text adventures, Ian Bell and David Braben had far bigger ambitions. *Elite* may look quaint by today's standards, but its approach to game design felt revolutionary at the time. Aside from its cutting-edge visuals, the real selling point of *Elite* was its sandbox-style gameplay that allowed you to pretty much play the game however you wanted. You could stay on everyone's good side and simply trade your way to success, become a hotshot pilot as you made your way across the galaxy or just have fun with the sheer amount of missions *Elite* offered. **DJ**

"I spent way too much time playing this. WAY TOO MUCH TIME... WAAAYYYY TOOOO MUCH!!!"
CHRIS SEAVOR CONKER'S BAD FUR DAY

"Countless hours spent playing this on the green screen Olivetti PC in my bedroom." **ALAN GALLACHER** RETRO GAMER PATRON

"The most surprising, 'Where did that come from?!' game release of all time." **MARTIN EDMONDSON** SHADOW OF THE BEAST, DRIVER

"It was the first game I played where you write your own story!"
STEVEN HALL RETRO GAMER PATRON

"Most of the mechanics of it went over my head in my youth but there is no denying the impact this had on gaming as a whole."
VINCE COONEY RETRO GAMER PATRON

"Planets, solar systems and 3D graphics crammed into 48K? How the hell did they do it?" **BILL HARBISON** ARTIST, OCEAN

6

PAC-MAN

NAMCO • 1980

When Toru Iwatani and his team came up with the concept of *Pac-Man*, little did they know they were creating the blueprints for one of gaming's most enduring franchises. While *Pac-Man* has certainly explored other avenues over the years, there's a reason developers have constantly returned to his pill-gobbling antics. As with *Space Invaders* and our number-one entry, the original concept of *Pac-Man* is timeless and while it's cleverly been expanded on in the intervening years, Namco has always kept those core mechanics. Of course, Namco's iconic game goes beyond that, with Iwatani's creation arguably becoming gaming's first proper videogame star. Pac-Man is a cornerstone when it comes to pop culture and he's been slapped on a frightening amount of merchandise – from lunchboxes to telephones (in fact, your humble editor is wearing a *Pac-Man* T-shirt right now). **DJ**

"What a time to be a kid in the early Eighties, *ET*, Rubik's Cube and Pac-Man!" **MARTYN HICKS** RG PATRON

"I've never mastered it. I still adore it." **DAVID KELSALL** RG Patron

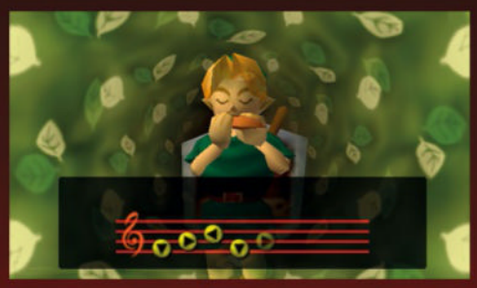
"A simple challenge. Munch-'em-up and dodge the ghosts. We learned a route that kept us safe for quite a few levels, but the ghosts still got smarter." **ANDREW BRAYBROOK** Uridium, Gribbly's Day Out

5

ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME

NINTENDO EAD • 1998

Few games of the time teased the promise of adventure like *Ocarina Of Time* did when you first stepped out onto Hyrule Field. Masterfully adapted to 3D by Nintendo EAD and featuring an innovative Z-lock system for handling combat, *Ocarina Of Time* deserves every accolade that was heaped upon it. While its time-spanning story might feel rather bland today, its world-building and boss design is second to none, while the ability to travel to any location you could see on Hyrule Field felt mind-blowing. Placed against *Breath Of The Wild* and *Tears Of The Kingdom*, it's clear to see that *Ocarina*'s game world is incredibly small, but it felt so back-breakingly ambitious in 1998 with familiar Hyrulean locations brought to life by an incredible 3D engine. Those later *Zeldas* (like many other similar games) owe a huge debt to *Ocarina* and it's little wonder that one of its directors, Eiji Aonuma, now holds the key to Hyrule's kingdom. **DJ**



"The classic *Zelda* formula perfected in 3D, moving games forward with a cohesive package and flawless execution." **TIM LONGO** STAR WARS: STARFIGHTER

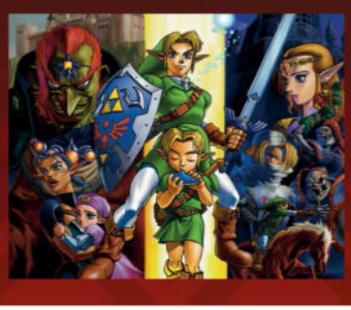
"Introduced more innovations to the open-world 3D adventure genre than you could shake a Deku Stick at." **GASSI THE CAT** RG PATRON

"Guiding Link through the two different time zones was an incredible and emotional experience." **DOUGLAS WILSON** RETRO GAMER PATRON

"Still the most timeless of all the *Zeldas*, and the wizards at Nintendo somehow perfected this transition to 3D on the first go." **ALAN WEN** FREELANCER

"I literally 'borrowed' a guy's N64 for 'just a weekend' to be able to play this. Still as good as *Zelda* gets for me." **MARK LIGGETT** RETRO GAMER PATRON

"This was mind blowing when it came out. A huge milestone in the history of gaming." **MARK R JONES** ARTIST, OCEAN



4

STREET FIGHTER II: THE WORLD WARRIOR

CAPCOM • 1991

Capcom's sequel not only punched its predecessor to the floor, but started a revolution in arcades that led to an explosion of similar games. With its globe-trotting combatants, slick animation, flash special moves and clever combos, it offered a satisfying array of mechanics that anyone could pick up, but only the most devout would fully master. This led to a huge resurgence of fighting games in the arcades and a rivalry between Capcom, Sega, SNK and Namco that remains to this day. *Street Fighter II*'s heroes are every bit as recognisable as the game itself and while new contenders have entered the fray over the years, Capcom has always ensured that the likes of Ryu, Ken and co have featured in many later games. It's a truly monumental brawler that's still a delight to play today. **DJ**

"A global phenomenon, it pulled people into arcades, sold many consoles and directly inspired numerous titles that followed."
KARA JANE ADAMS
RETRO GAMER PATRON

"There was one of these in the development 'barn' when we were making *Donkey Kong Country* and it would get regular use. Trying to shout the same phrases as the fighters was always fun, even though we had no idea what we were saying."
CHRIS SUTHERLAND
BANJO-KAZOOIE

"*Street Fighter II* kick-started the fighting game craze and I remain a huge fan of it today."
FRANK MATZKE
MEGA TURRICAN, APIDYA

"Fighting game balance that stands up to this day"
TOM HALL
COMMANDER KEEN, DOOM

3

SUPER MARIO 64

NINTENDO EAD • 1996

Mario's first 3D adventure remains a staggering achievement, both in its meticulous game design and how it influenced countless other videogames. While its 3D camera can feel a little archaic by today's exacting standards, it was leaps and bounds ahead of those found in many other 3D games of the time. A mission-based structure immediately separated *Super Mario 64* from its peers, while its hub-like approach to exploring Peach's castle would also creep into many other games, platformers and otherwise. Perhaps the biggest impact Nintendo's game offered over everything else though was the sheer sense of joy that came from experiencing Mario's fluid movement in his new 3D world. **DJ**

"An amazing experience at the time to see how Nintendo had approached bringing Mario into a 3D environment."
CHRIS SUTHERLAND BANJO-KAZOOIE

"When I was struggling to find work, I set myself a goal of 100 percenting this. It gave me a sense of achievement at a really difficult time."
THOMAS ENGLISH RG PATRON

"The first 3D run-and-jump that worked and it was glorious."
CHRIS HUELSBECK
MUSICIAN, TURRICAN II, APIDYA

"What else is there to say about this? It's been bettered since but to have experienced this back in 1996 when it first came out was something else. No one had ever seen anything like it before."
MARK R JONES ARTIST, OCEAN

"A watershed moment, just running around in the castle grounds felt amazing and it still has the best hub world of the series."
ANDY DAVIDSON WORMS, WORMS 2

"A revolution, which can never be recreated." **TURO HALINEN**
RETRO GAMER PATRON

"Revolutionary. With their debut title, Nintendo showed the world what 3D games could be."
STEVE ELLIS GOLDENEYE 007, TIMESPLITTERS

2

DOOM

ID SOFTWARE • 1993

Doom is a classic example of a developer blending bleeding-edge technology with a wealth of great ideas to create lightning in a bottle. John Carmack, John Romero, Tom Hall and the rest of the *Doom* team were no strangers to first-person shooters thanks to their success with *Wolfenstein 3D*, but *Doom* took things to a shocking new level.

Originally designed for cutting-edge PCs, *Doom* immediately caught the attention of gamers thanks to its flashy visuals, superbly atmospheric lighting effects, tremendous level design and satisfyingly enjoyable gunplay. Every weapon, from the opening humble pistol to the eventual BFG9000 and the always dependable chainsaw feel brilliant to use, while the varied enemies that are thrown at you keep the game tense and exciting with new tactics being needed to defeat each gruesome monster you encounter. Its dominance within the genre led to countless other FPSes being referred to as *Doom*-clones by the gaming press and you can still feel its influence in the modern-day shooters that are released today.

The global success of *Doom* meant that it would be converted to a plethora of later systems, from the SNES and Atari Jaguar to Sony's PlayStation and beyond, but its reach goes far greater than that. Check out the website canitrundoom.org and you'll discover that id Software's game has been converted to run on all sorts of hardware (with varying degrees of success), from a humble ATM to a pregnancy test screen.

With its relentless pace, challenging levels and superb armoury of weapons, *Doom* marked a significant shift in gaming on the time of its release and sent seismic shock waves through the industry that are still being felt to this very day. **DJ**

"Mods, violence, online multiplayer, superstar developers, what more? So influential for a while FPSes were '*Doom*-clones'." **ANDREA ROLLA** RETRO GAMER PATRON

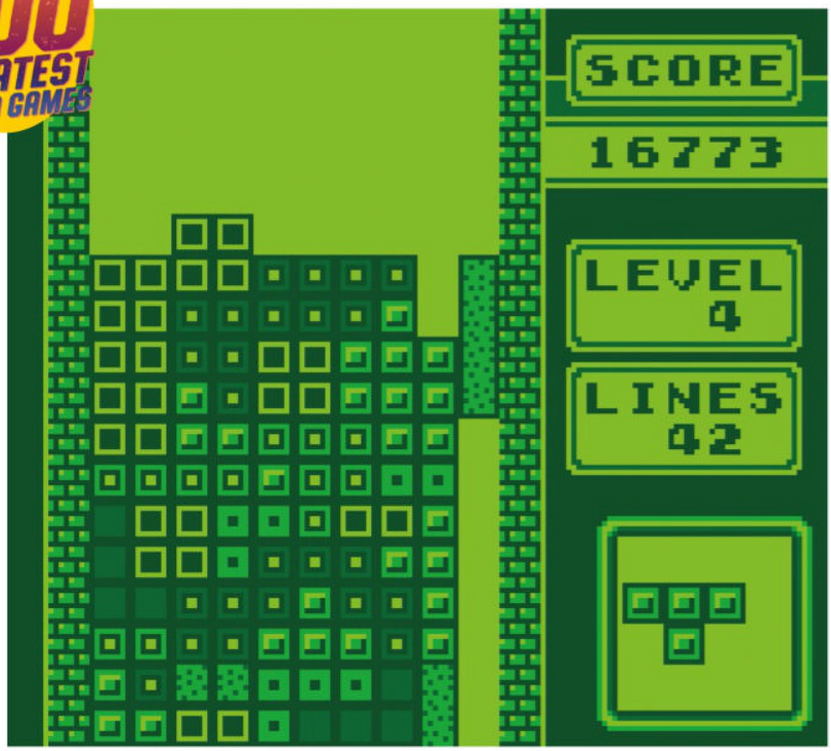
"*Wolfenstein 3D* invented the first-person shooter. *Doom* completed the journey to a fully rendered environment that was fast because it was 2.5D. And it was a vibe." **TOM HALL** COMMANDER KEEN, DOOM

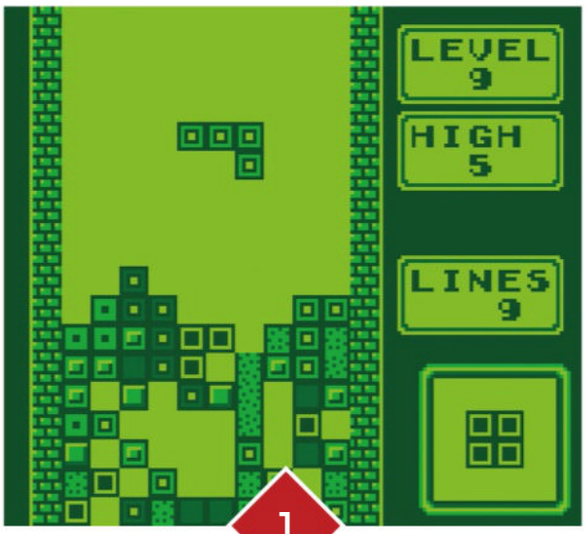
"Groundbreaking in so many ways. This is in my top 20 because of the multiplayer." **JAS AUSTIN** REX, R-TYPE DX

"The first time I played this, I was just knocked back by the fact it was running so quickly. A real sense of experiencing something new." **JASON PAGE** URIDIUM 2, REALMS

"Innovative, engaging and immersive. It created its own genre of gaming." **RICHARD SPITALNY** FOUNDER, FIRST STAR SOFTWARE

"A groundbreaking first-person shooter. Its impact on the gaming industry is immeasurable." **MICHAEL WILLIAMS** RETRO GAMER PATRON





1

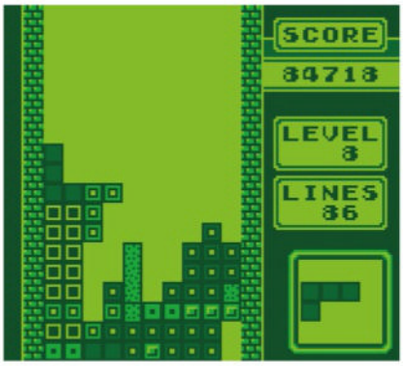
TETRIS

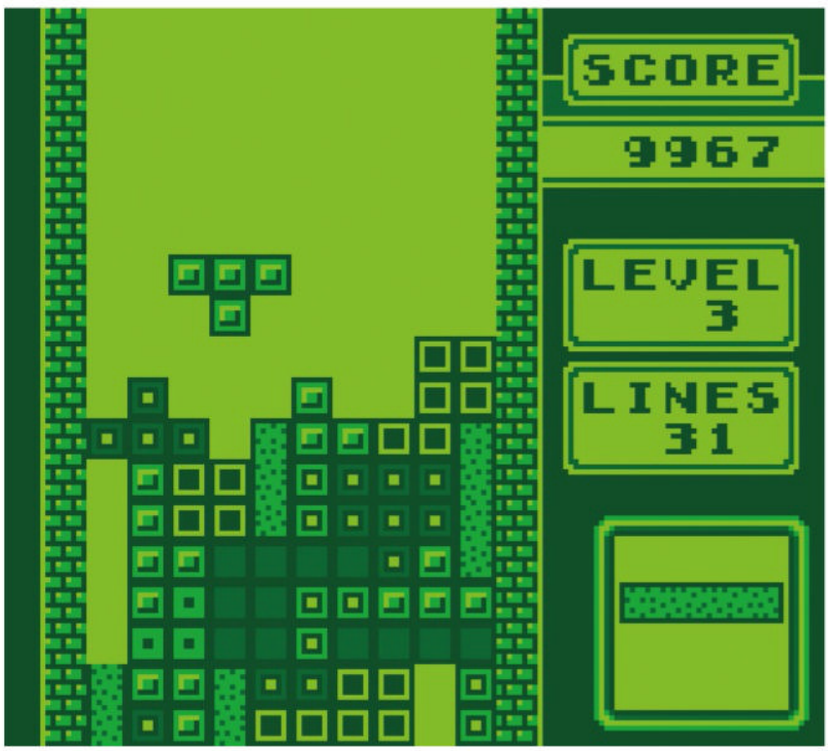
NINTENDO R&D1 • 1989

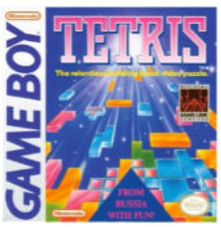
"Nothing remains unsaid about this game, the original black and white Game Boy version is hard to put down, even now."
MARTIN EDMONDSON
SHADOW OF THE BEAST, DRIVER

"The reason to buy a Game Boy."
STEVE ELLIS
GOLDENEYE 007, TIMESPLITTERS

"Helped gaming (and Game Boy) go mainstream. Addictive like nothing before."
TIM FITCHES RETRO GAMER PATRON



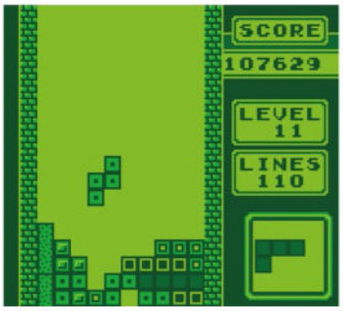




So here it is – *Tetris* is the retro game that stands at the top of the pile, and Alexey Pajitnov's block-dropping puzzler really is as close to being the perfect game as is possible. *Tetris* has universal appeal, thanks to its abstract presentation, simple inputs and our innate desire to create order from chaos. Solo games are fun, but brilliant multiplayer variants are available. Its inherent visual simplicity makes it adaptable, with versions on platforms as simple as the Atari 2600 and the Pokémon Mini possible without any compromises. It's likely that barely anybody reading this has played *Tetris* on an Elektronika 60, but what does it matter? The concept transcends the original hardware.

However, one version of *Tetris* holds a special place in the public consciousness and the hardware has a lot to do with it. The original Game Boy incarnation of *Tetris* garnered enough votes to take top honours here, and rightly so – *Tetris* was compulsive on other formats but portability turned it into a cultural icon. Bundling it with the Game Boy was one of the best decisions Nintendo ever made, as all it took to ensnare another player and sell another Game Boy was for a player to hand their console to a friend for a few minutes.

The presentation is excellent thanks to the dancers and those nifty little rocket launching scenes, and though previous versions included the Russian folk song Korobeiniki as a short jingle, Hirokazu Tanaka's version plays continuously as background music. Mechanically, the 25-line challenge of Game B is a thoughtful inclusion for players on the go, making for a great quick counterpart to Game A's endless action. What's more, the inclusion of attacks in the two-player mode was a huge development in multiplayer *Tetris*, with garbage lines becoming a staple of the series thereafter. It's true to say that the Game Boy was great for *Tetris*, but *Tetris* was equally great on the Game Boy. **NT**



"A great combination of thinking and action!"
RICHARD SPITALNY FOUNDER, FIRST STAR SOFTWARE

"The most elegant game of all time, and also the first successful, mass market mobile game."
TRIP HAWKINS FOUNDER, ELECTRONIC ARTS

"The Game Boy version of Pajitnov's puzzler was the perfect pack-in, the ultimate game on the go. This was software and hardware in perfect unison." **MARTYN CARROLL** FREELANCER

"A social phenomenon." **GUY MIQUEL-ALBERT** FREELANCER

"The greatest puzzle game of all time."
MIKE DIVER FREELANCER

"It feels like the learning curve of *Tetris* is the result of some high-level scientific research. As if the increasing difficulty is based of data of millions of gamers worldwide, young and old, of which machine learning has created the perfect game progression. But no, it is just a simple, but very well made pack-in game on a 35-year-old 8-bit handheld."
DANNY NELEMAN RETRO GAMER PATRON

"The symbiotic relationship between *Tetris* and the Game Boy helped both become legends, so many clones and sequels, and interest remains today with the recent news that the game can be played to a death screen." **KARL** RETRO GAMER PATRON

"It's the most addictive videogame of the Eighties."
ALEXANDER PENN RETRO GAMER PATRON

"If the Game Boy only had this, it would still have sold millions."
THOMAS ENGLISH RETRO GAMER PATRON

"Wasn't the first version, nor was it in colour, but it was the title that helped shift OG Game Boys - and then there was the joy/swearathon of Game Link cable battles."
GASSI THE CAT RETRO GAMER PATRON

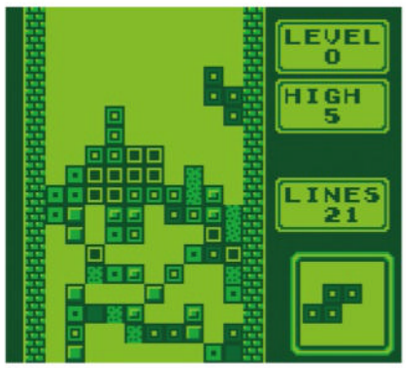
"Is there a more iconic puzzle game?"
TELESPIEL TOBI RETRO GAMER PATRON

"If only one game had ever been produced for Game Boy it would still have sold millions. You only needed one game. The single best retro game to play today."
MARK LIGGETT RETRO GAMER PATRON

"A timeless puzzle game. It popularised handheld gaming and casual play, becoming a household name. Its simple yet addictive gameplay mechanics laid the foundation for countless puzzle games and mobile gaming success stories."
MICHAEL WILLIAMS RETRO GAMER PATRON

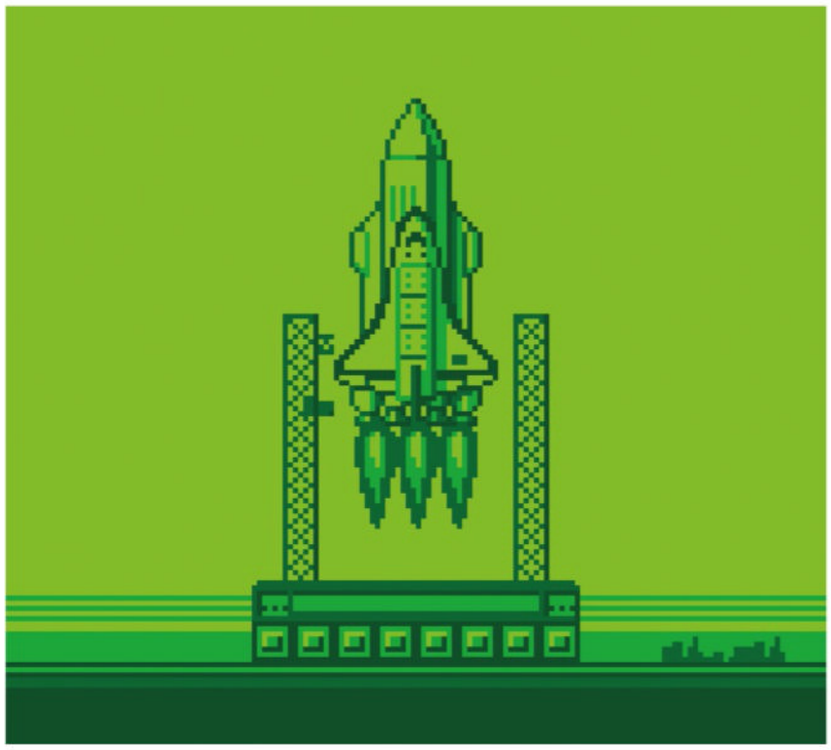
"I love *Tetris* but I never have managed to clear 200 lines on this version." **KAREN STACEY** RETRO GAMER PATRON

"Its simplicity belies its depth, especially in the Game Boy version. It can be handed to an eight year old or an eighty year old without instruction and within a minute they'll be engrossed."
KARA JANE ADAMS RETRO GAMER PATRON



"Though I personally prefer the NES release (and, overall, tend to favour Sega's *Tetris* lineage and the *Grandmaster* series that followed), *Tetris* was the greatest console bundle title of all time and is still something that anyone can pick up and play. A masterpiece."
JOHN TUCKER RETRO GAMER PATRON

"Possibly the world's greatest game. It's perfect. Everybody can enjoy it. Best played on an original Game Boy."
DAVID KELSALL RETRO GAMER PATRON



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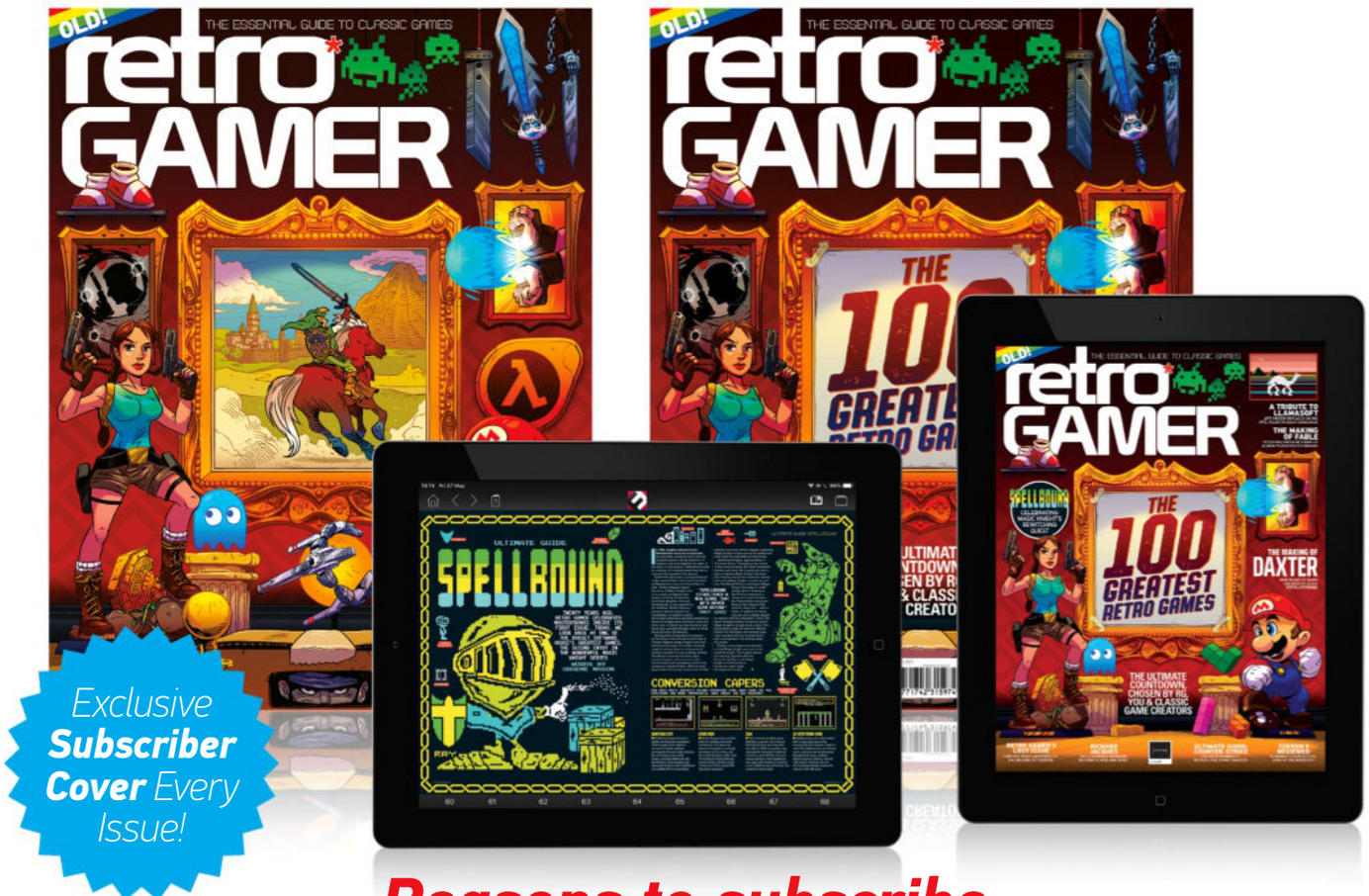
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WHATEVER HAPPENED TO... GAMES THAT NEVER SAW THE LIGHT OF DAY

» A short *Ninja Gaiden* retrospective was written by Sam Lockett, who was on work experience at Live. Beats being sent to a bank for a week.

» A number of features intended for issue 19 ended up on the *Retro Survival CD*, which can still be purchased at retrosurvival.co.uk

As fans drool over the prospect of a sequel to Ninja Gaiden for the Xbox, Sam Lockett looks back at Ryu's roots in the smoky arcade halls and his defining adventures on the NES. Shurikens at the ready – we're going in!

It was 1988 when Japanese ninja Ryu Hayabusa first walked the streets of America, battling his way through armies of lowly gang members and somewhat comical circus creeps; swinging from poles and gliding gracefully through the air, only to be swiped sideways by a seven-foot, bat-wielding maniac. Tecmo's arcade game was hard, very hard, and no reason was given as to why Ryu had to undertake this painful test of endurance. Perhaps he flashed his Rolex at the wrong people... But when you'd watched poor Ryu die over and over again, you realised that the lack of storyline didn't matter. Ryu winded up in America because Tecmo said so, and that was good enough for us.

We sympathise with fellow Ninja Gaiden addicts, not only for the social life you probably missed out on, but for the wrist pains we're sure you suffered after countless hours of getting whipped. But you've got to admit, it was damn good fun, despite the insane difficulty level. And the fact that it had you cowering behind the sofa with what we're sure must be one of the scariest continue screens ever – who can forget the demons attempting to shove a spinning saw through Ryu's chest? We can't.

The following year, Ninja Gaiden was brought to the NES. Due to the limited hardware, the large arcade sprites were shrunk right down, and as you'd expect from a NES game, more platforming elements were introduced. With this game, the reason for Ryu's Stateside rampage was finally revealed. In the opening comic-style intro, we learnt that Ryu's father was slain in an epic ninja duel. Ryu swore an oath to find his father's killer and make swift his revenge. Admittedly, it's not the most imaginative storyline ever written, but it provided Ryu with a purpose, rather than simply beating up bad guys for fun and profit.

Once the plot had been established, you were thrown onto the mean city streets. The NES game featured new skills for Ryu, including ninja magic and the ability to climb walls. It was still insanely difficult, but players now stood a chance against the onslaught of hoodlums that blocked their path – a small chance, but a significant leap in power from the Ayes. Though bundled software like Deluxe Paint 4 AGA and Wordworth 2.0 AGA were impressive, the games in the pack were an insult. Oscar was a simple, bug-riddled platformer that took advantage of none of the Aczoss's enhancements, whilst Dennis was another shoddy platformer based on an even shoddier kids' movie. Dennis did have the benefit of being AGA enhanced, but still looked incredibly poor and gave the wrong impression about the fledgling Aczoss.

Following the trend of the Desktop Dynamite bundle, many publishers were reluctant to develop AGA-exclusive titles as it would limit the sales to just those users with new machines. So, for a couple of years, most games were designed to work on the original Amigas and only took slightly better on the AGAs. This soon began to change as more Aczoss owners upgraded to the Aczoss, and in November 1993 the first real AGA-only game was released. Overkill was a Defender clone with graphics that owed much to the Amiga's skilled demo scene: each level featured several layers of smooth parallax scrolling and used the Aczoss's palette of 16.8 million colours to create backgrounds awash with trippy effects. Though its gameplay was nothing new and the sprites were a little lacking, Overkill showed that the new Amigas had definite promise and would soon go on to host some truly great games.

In December 1993, everyone's favourite Amiga developer, Team 17, unleashed the first AGA title: Alien Breed II was available for both OCS (original Chipset) machines and AGA machines, but the AGA version was released first and featured several enhancements over its OCS counterpart. Each level used the Aczoss's wide range of colours to draw suitably different scenery, and the new AGA's speed-handling capabilities allowed Team 17 to display several more aliens on screen at once. Although this made it the more difficult of the two versions, it also resulted in a much more intense experience.

Among the many, many, a trickle of other AGA-exclusive titles hit the shop shelves. Undefeated gamesplit-jokers were the 1992 artist Elevation, the PD-sensation Deluxe Galaga, Brutal Sports Football, Alfred Chicken, Dangerous Streets and Arabian Nights. The future looked bright for Aczoss and Aabnix owners, but

Next Level Gaming:
AMIGA CD/AGA
From the launch of the Amiga 1000 in 1985 to the crash landing of the CD32 in 1993, Commodore constantly reinvented the Amiga hardware in the hope it could better both home PCs and games consoles. It occasionally achieved that aim and sometimes just fell flat on its face. Ashley Day evaluates the games that emerged during Commodore's final few years and beyond

» Games enhanced for the AGA Amiga models were the subject of the issue's Next Level Gaming feature.

RETRO GAMER'S MISSING ISSUE

Over the past 20 years there have been 257 issues of Retro Gamer. Yet there was one more that was never published. Let's find out what happened to the load that failed

Words by Martyn Carroll

IN THE KNOW

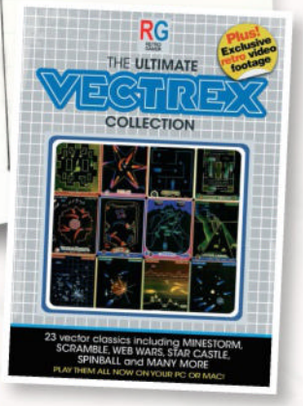
» **PUBLISHER:** LIVE PUBLISHING

» **EDITOR:** MARTYN CARROLL

» **FORMAT:** A4, 100 PAGES

» **DUE FOR RELEASE:** AUGUST 2005

» The coverdisc was also completed and featured a catalogue of Vectrex games to play under emulation.


RG
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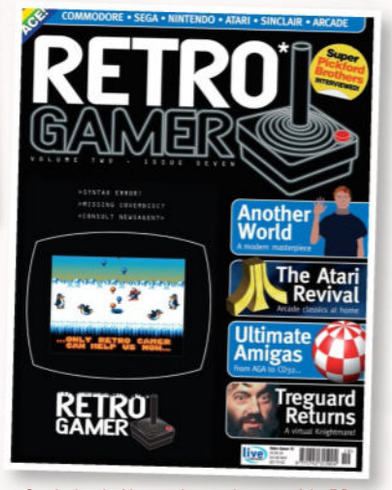


» Continuing the Vectrex theme, elements of the **RG** logo were redrawn to give it a vector game look.

The first 18 issues of Retro Gamer were published by Live Publishing, a small magazine house that collapsed in August 2005. Yet before its demise, a 19th issue was fully completed, waiting to be published. When the magazine was resurrected at Imagine Publishing later that year, with current editor Darran at the helm, a new 19th issue was published featuring fresh content. So what became of the articles in that original issue 19?

Writers, particularly freelance writers, and *especially* freelance gaming writers, are a resourceful bunch, so you'll be unsurprised to hear that many of the articles appeared elsewhere. A number of them were included on *Retro Survival*, a CD-based project released in November 2005 and put together by the freelancers who lost out financially when Live went under. Chief among these were an in-depth hardware feature about the Vectrex, written by Mat Allen, and Ashley Day's look at games that were enhanced for the AGA Amigas. A number of regular features also ended up on the CD, including Back To The Eighties (covering August 1985), Strange Games (looking at Ninjasploitation titles) and High Score (featuring *Donkey Kong* champ Steve Wiebe). An upside of the CD format was that the original, full-length articles could be featured, with no edits required. For example, the submitted Vectrex article was 10,000+ words and a third had to be chopped to squeeze it into the mag, yet the whole tome was on the CD.

Several other articles would find a home in the relaunched **Retro Gamer** at Imagine Publishing. These included Paul Drury's Desert Island Disks with the Pickford brothers, which appeared in the published **RG** 19, making it the only article intended for the original issue 19 that ended up in the new one. A cut-down version of John Szczepaniak's article on the Brazilian gaming scene was in **RG** 20, while the making of *Another World* with Eric Chahi turned up in **RG** 24, albeit in a

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MISSING ISSUE

DESERT ISLAND DISKS: THE PICKFORDS

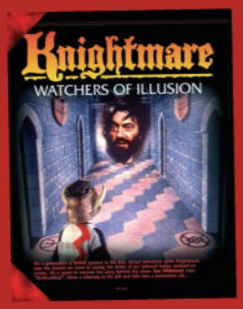
PAUL DRURY

■ Drury, in a pub with John and Ste Pickford, chatting about their careers and the games they'd take with them to a desert island. Doesn't get much better. Read it now in the published **RG** 19.

KNIGHTMARE: WATCHERS OF ILLUSION

DAN WHITEHEAD

■ A peek behind the scenes of the ITV show, featuring interviews with producer Tim Child, Hugo Myatt and one of the winning dungeoneers. Later published in *Cult Times* issue 122.



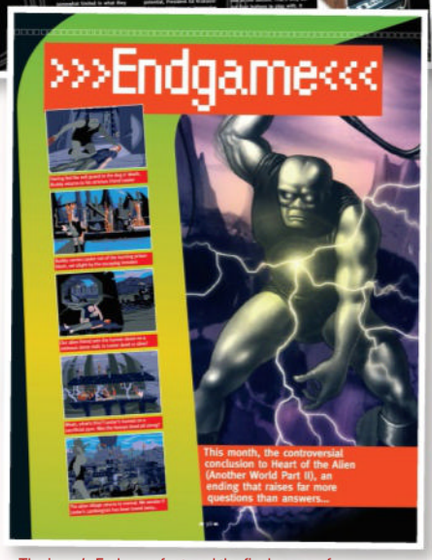
GLOBAL GAMING: BRAZIL

JOHN SZCZEPANIAK

■ The globe-trotting series stops off in Brazil to report on the country's gaming culture. John's original text was extensive and it was cut down to fit into four pages. It was reduced again to two pages for **RG** 20.

» The issue included a seven-page feature on the creation of Eric Chahi's amazing *Another World*.

» GCE's quirky Vectrex console took centre stage in the unpublished issue.



» The issue's Endgame featured the final scene of *Another World* sequel *Heart Of The Alien*.

heavily revised form. A short piece on the unreleased Vectrex game *Mail Plane*, originally included as part of Frank Gasking's Games That Weren't column, eventually appeared as an expanded standalone article in **RG** 41.

A couple of articles wound up in other places. Dan Whitehead's feature about kids' TV show *Knightmare* was published in the November 2005 issue of UK genre mag *Cult Times*. For reasons he forgets, your correspondent's article on games linked to rock bands (*Crüe Ball*, *Revolution X* and so on) randomly popped up on Eurogamer.net in January 2008, under its original title Rock Star Games. And that was pretty much that. A few bits were never published anywhere, but this was mostly monthly stuff like the news, reviews, reader letters, the coverdisc (remember those?) and the next month page (teasing an in-progress article about the Oric range of computers, which would ultimately appear in **RG** 29).

That said, there were a couple of interesting articles that sadly didn't get published. The first was a special letters spread that stemmed from the Gilsoft article in **RG** 16. We asked readers who had used utilities like The Quill to create their own games back in the day to send in their tales of trying to get them professionally published – and we received quite a few responses. Some of these included scans of the letters they received back from publishers and it was fascinating to read them (note to Ed: this would make a great feature one day). [Agreed – Ed]

The second was a brief history of the *Ninja Gaiden* series. No great loss, you might think, yet this was written by Sam Lockett, one of two lads who happened to be at Live on work experience at the time, precisely as the company was going to the wall (the other, Ant Cooke, contributed some reviews). These two teens gained an eye-opening insight into the exciting and unpredictable world of magazine publishing – and no doubt revised their career aspirations soon after. It's a shame their work was never published, but they did leave with a good story to tell. Obviously the main story here is that **Retro Gamer** thankfully survived this blip, and all the main features in the unpublished issue 19 appeared elsewhere. The original pages were all backed up safely at the time and are now just a footnote in the magazine's 20-year history. ✱

"Several articles would find a home in the relaunched RG at Imagine Publishing"

SHIELD

GREEN CRYSTAL

ULTIMATE GUIDE

SPELLBOUND

MAGIC KNIGHT

MIRROR

TWENTY YEARS AGO, RETRO GAMER CELEBRATED MASTERTRONIC INSIDE ITS FIRST ISSUE. TODAY, WE LOOK BACK AT ONE OF THE BUDGET SOFTWARE HOUSE'S GREATEST GAMES, THE SECOND ENTRY IN THE WONDERFUL MAGIC KNIGHT SERIES

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

In 1985, budget-software house Mastertronic stood at a crossroads. Its early titles, priced at just £1.99 and available across a broad spectrum of retailers, had sold healthily but were, in the main, of low quality. If Mastertronic was to continue, its founders knew they had to improve the standard of its games.

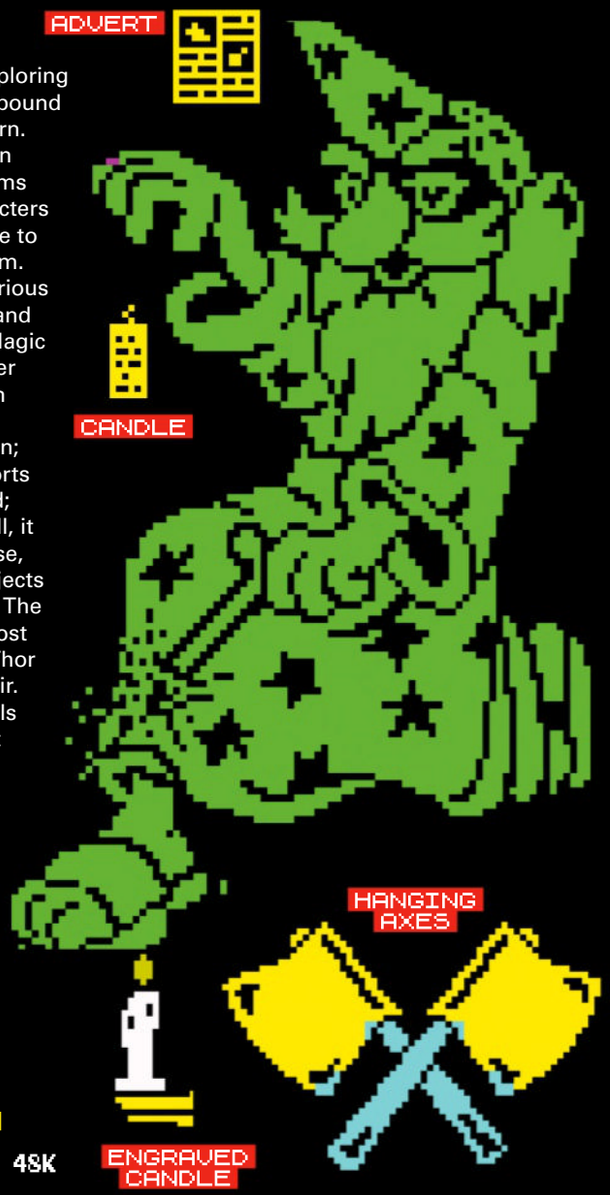
Earlier the same year, a young freelance coder named David Jones had submitted to Mastertronic one of its finest titles to date. *Finders Keepers* begins the story of Magic Knight, sent on a crucial crusade by their master, the King Of Ibsisima, to find his daughter, Princess Germintrude, a nice present for her birthday. *Finders Keepers* proved a decent-sized hit, its combination of platform action and arcade adventure elements elevating it above its budget peers and even many full-price ones. A follow-up seemed like a jolly good idea, and David began work on what would become *Spellbound*.

Having either presented the treasure to the King or run off with it at the end of *Finders Keepers*, Magic Knight now finds herself at the centre of a rather untimely magical mishap. Keen to overcome his inherent distaste for rice pudding, Gimbal The Wizard miscasts his latest spell, transporting himself and seven other unfortunates from throughout time to the mysterious Castle Of Karn. With his final gasp before becoming imprisoned, Gimbal reaches out to his former student, imploring Magic Knight to help rescue the spellbound octet from the cold walls of Castle Karn.

Spellbound begins, appropriately, in The Start Room. Throughout the rooms of the stone building, the other characters wander, and each has a particular role to play in helping Magic Knight free them. Also littered around the castle are various items that Magic Knight can pick up and use. The Wand Of Command gives Magic Knight the power to order people about; blowing in the Elf Horn summons a character to their location; the Teleport Key transports them to the Teleport Pad; and the sticky bun… well, it sticks. In addition to these, you can use multiple objects to interact with the characters. Florin The Dwarf charges bottles of liquid to boost Magic Knight's energy levels, while Thor desperately seeks his hammer, Miolnir. Elrand The Halfelven can destroy walls once reunited with his trumpet (don't ask), and Samson The Strong needs his javelin.

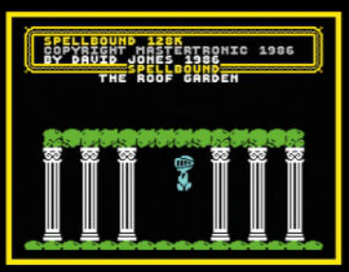
> "SPELLBOUND ESTABLISHED A NEW GENRE THAT WE'D NEVER SEEN BEFORE"
> TRACY LEWIS

Finally, some objects are blended to help Magic Knight cast one of her powerful spells. The inaptly-named red herring, blended with the Power Pong Plant, aids Magic Knight in the Fumaticus Protection spell, while the engraved candle, ▶



CONVERSION CAPERS

HOW DOES MAGIC KNIGHT'S SECOND ADVENTURE FARE AWAY FROM THE 48K SPECTRUM? AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, WHAT ABOUT THE RED HERRING?



AMSTRAD CPC

■ Ed Hickman's Amstrad port is a slightly odd affair that nevertheless retains enough of the original to succeed. A suitably regal tune accompanies the game while, bizarrely, the red herring is now a white herring, somewhat diluting the joke. Nevertheless, *Amtix* magazine was impressed enough to award *Spellbound* an incredible 98% for presentation.

ATARI 800

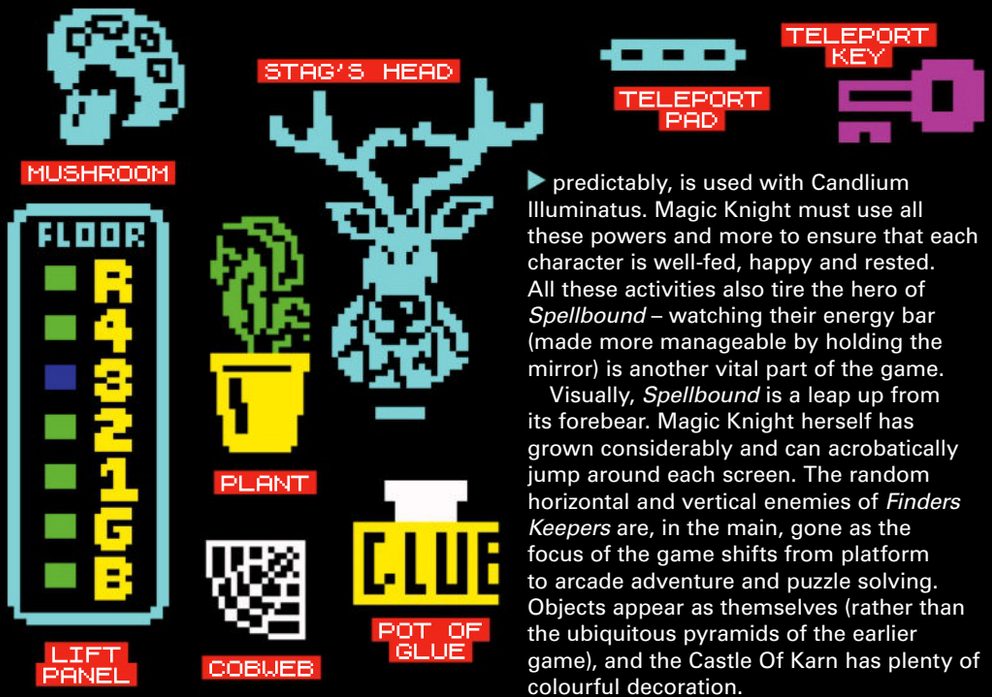
■ Adrian Sheppard was on Atari duties for *Spellbound* and did a decent job. The menus are slower to manipulate, eventually becoming a bit of a chore, and the red herring looks a little, well, off. But Magic Knight still leaps around cleanly, and this version retains most of the original 48K Spectrum's gameplay.

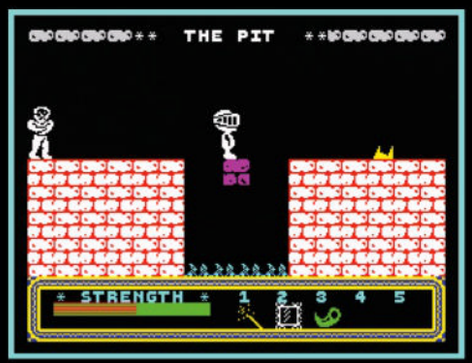
C64

■ This is another excellent game, faithfully converted, with a decent Rob Hubbard tune and some short spot effects. While its graphics may resemble the Spectrum's a little too closely for some C64 fans, the price and presentation meant *Spellbound* was again well-reviewed. It features a very-slightly-brown red herring. Say chestnut or burnt umber.

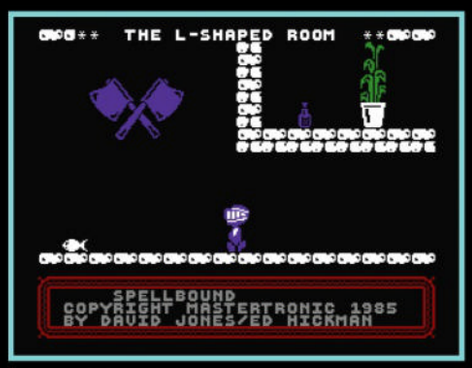
ZX SPECTRUM 128K

■ *Spellbound* was one of the earliest titles to take advantage of the improved Sinclair computer. There's a sweet Rob Hubbard tune, over 20 new rooms, and improved set decoration throughout the game, making it brilliant value for software-starved 128K owners. However, the red herring disappointingly remains the same as in the 48K game.





» [ZX Spectrum] David Jones told us in **RG** 27 that Magic Knight was female. This was going to be revealed in the fifth game.



» [Amstrad CPC] A white herring replaces the red variety in the Amstrad version.

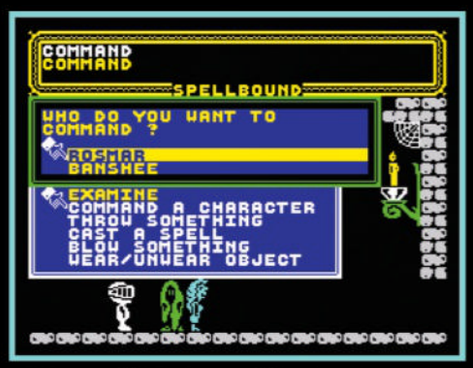
▶ predictably, is used with Candlium Illuminatus. Magic Knight must use all these powers and more to ensure that each character is well-fed, happy and rested. All these activities also tire the hero of *Spellbound* – watching their energy bar (made more manageable by holding the mirror) is another vital part of the game.

Visually, *Spellbound* is a leap up from its forebear. Magic Knight herself has grown considerably and can acrobatically jump around each screen. The random horizontal and vertical enemies of *Finders Keepers* are, in the main, gone as the focus of the game shifts from platform to arcade adventure and puzzle solving. Objects appear as themselves (rather than the ubiquitous pyramids of the earlier game), and the Castle Of Karn has plenty of colourful decoration.

Most impressive, however, is David Jones' new menu system, dubbed 'Windimation'. Pressing space brings up a menu, which begins with simple commands such as Drop, Pick Up and Examine Item. As Magic Knight explores the castle and progresses in certain areas, new options will appear in the menu. For example, picking up the Elf Horn enables her to summon characters to her location – but first, they must blow into it. Incidentally, she can now blow on all her other items, which usually results in a puff of dust. Easy to use and understand and comprehensive in its list of commands, Windimation makes *Spellbound* a joy to play and was to become an integral facet of all the *Magic Knight* games from this point onwards.

"MOST IMPRESSIVE, HOWEVER, IS DAVID JONES'S NEW MENU SYSTEM, DUBBED 'WINDIMATION'"

» [ZX Spectrum 128K] One of the 128K Spectrum's extra rooms. Boing!



» [ZX Spectrum 128K] The Spectrum 128K version adds more colour to its characters.

Released at the end of 1985, Mastertronic decided that *Spellbound* was undeserving of a lowly £1.99 price tag. Having already launched the Mastertronic Added Dimension label a few weeks earlier with *The Last V8*, the *Magic Knight* sequel became one of the first MAD games, costing a pound more at £2.99. As with all MAD games, a comic-style scene appeared on the cover, featuring three characters from the game: Thor, Gimbal The Wizard and, of course, a formidable-looking Magic Knight. The amalgamation of price, first-rate presentation and superb gameplay was Nepeta Cataria to the Spectrum magazines in particular. "*Finders Keepers* was excellent, but *Spellbound* is superlative," gushed *Crash*,

GIMBAL WILL NOW SEND EACH CHARACTER BACK TO THEIR HOMES AS YOU SUMMON THEM. THE ORDER IS VERY IMPORTANT BUT GIMBAL THINKS YOU SHOULD HAVE THE PICTURE BY NOW.
F RELEASE SPELL
G QUITICUS GAMUS
PRESS SPACE OR FIRE TO CONTINUE
COMMAND
CAST RELEASE SPELL

» [ZX Spectrum] What does the spell Quiticus Gamus do?

FROM ACROSS TIME

THE CAST OF SPELLBOUND, HOW THEY CAN HELP MAGIC KNIGHT, AND VICE-VERSA

FLORIN THE DWARF

■ Florin can create magical strength potions to boost Magic Knight's energy. He's also good at repairing talismans.

THOR

■ Thor's lost his hammer. Help him get it back, and he can perform various tasks, such as fixing lifts and damaging walls.

ELRAND THE HALFELVEN

■ Like Thor, Elrand is good at attacking walls but needs his trumpet. Obviously. Elrand starts the game in possession of Thor's hammer.

SAMSON THE STRONG

■ Samson has mislaid his precious javelin. Return it to him, and he can assist Magic Knight in traversing a cavernous pit.

» [Atari 800] The lift sits at the far left of the castle. Magic Knight will spend a lot of time here if he's to free Gimbal.

citing Windimation as better than the menu techniques used in full-price games such as *Frankie Goes To Hollywood* and *Shadowfire*. An incredible final score of 95% followed, and *Spellbound* was equally praised on the Amstrad and Commodore 64, the latter port from soon-to-be Codemasters cofounder Richard Darling.

The following year, David Jones busied himself on a sequel and a special 128K Spectrum upgrade for *Spellbound*. Now, 128K owners could enjoy a jaunty tune while exploring the original castle and its several extra rooms. Clearly, Gimbal's had the builders in. "So, the upshot of all this is that *Spellbound* is now, if it wasn't before, a blippin' brilliant game," noted Phil South in *Your Sinclair*, "and deserving a place in every Speccer's collection forthwith." Meanwhile, the sequel, *Knight Tyme*, thrusts Magic Knight into a *Star Trek*-esque future before the fourth game, *Stormbringer*, brings the series full circle, returning our time-travelling hero to their own era, more or less.

Yet back in 1985, *Spellbound*, for its programmer, publisher and the games market in general, represents a watershed moment where budget games came out of the shadows and into the mainstream. These cheap games, usually purchased on a whim by unsuspecting and skint teenagers, were no longer a guarantee of destitute gaming and poor reviews. From this moment onwards, gamers could reasonably expect a decent standard of software for their £1.99 or £2.99, not least a mythical arcade adventure featuring Thor, a Red Herring that's not a red herring and an

DEVELOPER Q&A

RETRO GAMER TALKS TO TRACY LEWIS, THE CODER BEHIND SPELLBOUND'S RECENT MSX PORT

PRESUMABLY, YOU'RE A FAN OF THE MSX?
I got my first MSX computer in 1985 and I've been hooked ever since then. It's not a 'retro' thing for me since I have never stopped using MSX machines.

WHAT MEMORIES DO YOU HAVE OF THE ORIGINAL *MAGIC KNIGHT GAMES*, PARTICULARLY *SPELLBOUND*?
Believe it or not, I only discovered *Spellbound* a few years ago. I bought *Knight Tyme* back in the day and found it hypnotic and fascinating. Later, I got a pirated copy of the other *Magic Knight* titles that were available for the MSX. However, *Knight Tyme* was the only *Magic Knight* game I ever managed to finish.

WHAT DO YOU THINK MAKES *SPELLBOUND* SO SPECIAL?
Spellbound established a new genre that we'd never seen before – a mix between an arcade game, a text adventure and a graphic adventure. David [Jones] was a bit of a whiz when it came to the 'Windimation' system.

WHAT WAS DAVID'S REACTION WHEN YOU ASKED HIM ABOUT DOING AN MSX PORT OF *SPELLBOUND*?
I contacted David on Facebook and showed him an early version of the game on MSX. He liked it and agreed to let me make the port as long as he was credited as the original author. I also had to remove Mastertronic's name from it.

DID HE GIVE YOU ANY OF THE GAME'S ORIGINAL CODE TO WORK FROM?
David pointed me to a disassembled code someone else had made. But I had already done my own disassembling using NSA's Ghidra.

HOW LONG DID THE WORK TAKE YOU TO COMPLETE?
It took about a month to have a playable version and several more months to add MSX-specific enhancements and fix issues. I found some bugs in the original game – for instance, characters would reappear randomly across the map after being sent to their time.

WHAT WAS THE HARDEST PART OF THE PORT?
It was definitely adding the music. I originally borrowed it from the Spectrum 128K game, but I wasn't satisfied with the AY version. So, I ended up writing a new arrangement based on Rob Hubbard's original composition for the Commodore 64.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WANTED TO IMPLEMENT BUT COULDN'T?
I started from the 48K version, and later – too late – I found out that the 128K version had a more extensive map and some other new features. I might release an extended version someday, including the 128K map and even more enhancements.

WERE YOU SURPRISED MASTERTRONIC DIDN'T RELEASE AN MSX VERSION BACK IN THE DAY?
Absolutely! That's why I decided to make this game.

To find out more about Tracy's work, head over to mastropiero.itch.io/spellbound-msx

BANSHEE
■ Once released, the Banshee provides clues on how Magic Knight must proceed. Just ask it to help, and a useful tip is yours.

ORIK THE CLERIC
■ Orik desires the powerful Book Of Shadows. Don't ask why or what the book's about [Shadows, innit – Ed]. Just get it for him.

LADY ROSMAR
■ The haughty Lady Rosmar likes a laser and knows how to use it. That should come in handy for finally demolishing that pesky wall.

GIMBAL THE WIZARD
■ Once freed, the elderly mage uses his powers to return each character, including Magic Knight, to their own time. At least, that's the plan…

Grind Stormer

PREPARE FOR A BULLET STORM

» ARCADE » 1993 » TOAPLAN

I like to think I'm pretty open in my tastes, but I haven't always paid equal attention to certain genres, and one that I neglected for quite a while as a kid was shoot-'em-ups. I'd enjoyed games like *R-Type* on the Master System and really loved playing *Bio Hazard Battle* with my dad, but general interest in the genre was fading and I never ended up with any shoot-'em-ups on my Mega Drive or PlayStation. [Outrageous – Ed] As a result, I was absolutely floored when my friend James introduced me to bullet hell with *Giga Wing* on the Dreamcast. Games like *Mars Matrix* and *Gunbird 2* soon taught me that this was the norm in modern shoot-'em-ups, and I quickly embraced it.

What I didn't understand was how we'd reached that point, so I started to go back and look at what I'd missed, which brought me to the lineage of Toaplan and Cave. *Grind Stormer* was one of the first games I played – I'd like to say it was on the strength of the name alone, but it was also because I could potentially get the Mega Drive version. I quickly realised that would be a bad idea because it's quite an expensive game with failure-prone cartridges, but I digress.

Playing *Grind Stormer* made me realise that it wasn't a million miles away from games that I was familiar with like *Truxton* – also a Toaplan game – it just had more in the way of enemy fire that wasn't directly targeted at the player. Suddenly things were a bit clearer, and I thought it was quite remarkable that the genre had started to evolve towards its modern form as early as it did. I'm really hoping that a home version of the arcade game will be released sooner rather than later, as it's a game I've really grown to appreciate over the years.

CONGRATULATIONS
CONGRATULATIONS
20 years of retro GAMER
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A TRIBUTE TO LLAMASOFT

HAIRY BEASTS, BANGING SOUNDTRACKS AND A WHOLE LOT OF BLASTING – JEFF MINTER AND IVAN ZORZIN TAKE US ON A FOUR-DECADE TOUR OF LLAMASOFT'S UNMISTAKABLE BACK CATALOGUE

WORDS BY PAUL DRURY

JEFF MINTER

The founder and head director of Llamasoft, Jeff is the game designer and creative visionary. Also, the premier light synth DJ this side of Cardiff.

IVAN ZORZIN

Technical director of Llamasoft, Ivan, aka 'Giles The Billy Goat', creates the game engines which power the company's output. Makes fantastic Italian coffee, too.

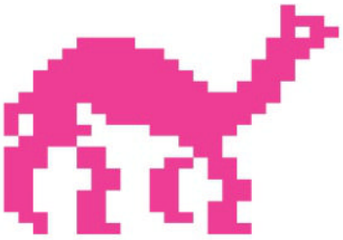
Few software houses can boast a history stretching back over four decades and we can think of only one that has remained broadly unchanged, in terms of personnel and its approach to game design: Llamasoft. Founded by Jeff Minter in 1982, his company has spent 42 years making games for a bewildering array of computers and consoles and shows no signs of stopping.

"I think part of the reason I call myself 'Ox' is that I've been persistent, just plodding along, really," says Jeff, musing on Llamasoft's impressive longevity. "I'm not a particularly smart beast, but I'll carry on until I get the job done. And I've just been doing that for years."

For over half of those years, he was essentially a one-man band, creating games at home, first from his parent's house in Tadley, Hampshire, before moving to rural Wales in 1987. Apart from a few years in the mid-Nineties when he joined Atari in California, Jeff has maintained his status as a UK-based independent developer, though in 2004, Llamasoft doubled its size when Ivan Zorzin joined the fold. Leaving his hometown of Monfalcone in Italy, Ivan became both Jeff's coding and life partner, and for the last 20 years, the pair have been producing their distinctive brand of psychedelic shooters out of a remote farmhouse near Carmarthen, surrounded by fields, sheep and, yes, llamas.

"It's really true about persistence," agrees Ivan. "Jeff can be very obstinate. When he wants to do something, he wants to do it his own way, but when we say we're going to do something, we do it, whatever it takes".

Llamasoft's rich legacy is now the subject of a new compilation, meaning many more gamers can appreciate its superb history. ✱



ANDES ATTACK

VIC-20 • 1982

Not Jeff's first game nor the first to appear under the Llamasoft label but this *Defender* clone showed he was willing to take on the task of converting a major coin-op to a humble home micro, adding some distinctive Minter motifs in the process. In short, the shape of things to come.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

"The ship is the size of a bus, there are loads of bugs, it controls horribly and it scrolls horribly. It's a bit of a mess really, but it was enough to get us noticed. An American firm saw it at a show in London and they ended up publishing my stuff in the USA. I mean, the rest of the VIC-20 software must have been absolutely dreadful, if they thought this was the best."

ATTACK OF THE MUTANT CAMELS

C64, ATARI 8-BIT • 1983

Emboldened by the positive reception to his early VIC-20 releases, his move to the C64 allowed Jeff to up the animal ante, even if, by his own admission, the camels here "look like two fat blokes in a pantomime costume". The psychedelic visuals when you warp between levels would also become a Llamasoft motif.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

"I saw a review of the Parker Brothers *The Empire Strikes Back* VCS game in *CVG* magazine where they described the walkers as being giant mechanical camels and I thought, 'I love camels… why don't I do it with actual camels!' It was the start of our beastliness, really. When it did well, I realised people were remembering this game because it is distinctive, because it's got big beasties in. So let's have more beasties!"

GRIDRUNNER

VIC-20, VARIOUS • 1982

Jeff cites this as an important stepping stone for his fledgling company, as it was not only his first real commercial success in the UK, the game got him noticed across the pond, as well. A futuristic reworking of a bona fide arcade classic, it still plays impressively well today.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

"Everybody was doing copies of arcade games back then and Atari were getting a bit leery about it. I wanted to do *Centipede*, so I decided to add some features of my own to make it different and it came out really well. It took me a week, beginning to end, and it's the best week's work of my life because that game eventually ended up getting to number one in the US."

KEEP ON RUNNING GRIDRUNNER FOLLOW-UPS

MATRIX

■ Confusingly renamed *Attack Of The Mutant Camels* for the US release, this ups the challenge in terms of pace and number of enemies.

VOIDRUNNER

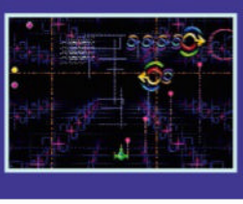
■ Released through budget label MAD, Jeff puts you in charge of four ships, which helps when you're facing such a frantic onslaught of enemies.

SUPER GRIDRUNNER

■ Jeff moves the game up to the 16-bits, adding power-ups and various visual flourishes, whilst maintaining the core single-screen blasting.

GRIDRUNNER++

■ Initially released for the Pocket PC in 2002 as a shareware game, this has a sweet retro feel and signalled *Gridrunner*'s move to mobiles.



HOVER BOVVER

C64, ATARI 8-BIT • 1983

A change of pace for Jeff, as he swaps blasting aliens for trimming lawns. Infinitely more fun than it sounds, due to clever garden design, angry neighbours and a horticulturist very protective of his flower beds. Mastering mower inertia and knowing when to unleash your hound adds to the fun.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

"My dad and I were staying at a farmhouse near Solihull for a computer show and we looked outside the window and there was somebody mowing the grass in the grounds of this nice house. We said, 'Yeah, we could make a game out of that!' We kicked this idea back and forth and the game has always been special to me because it was designed by me and my dad, together. There was such creativity in the 8-bit era. They used to rate games for originality, which was really nice. You could just try anything."

LAZER ZONE

C64, VARIOUS • 1983

What initially seems to be a pretty simple shooter is given considerable depth by tasking you with controlling two ships simultaneously. Saving yourself by carefully twisting one ship and taking out an enemy advancing on the other isn't easy but supremely satisfying when you pull it off.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

"I was just being experimental. I mean, the game itself is very basic, just a *Space Invaders* kind of thing, but I thought, 'Why don't you have two ships at once on different axes, and then you could shoot across and protect each other?' I was on a bus in Portugal, when the idea popped into my head, and I just thought I'd try it and see what happens."

REVENGE OF THE MUTANT CAMELS

C64, ATARI ST • 1984

Jeff revisiting and reimagining his past work would become a feature of his career and he does it with real style here. Now you get to be the camel, marching, leaping and spitting your way through wave after wave of bizarre baddies. This is clearly a game close to Jeff's heart – only last year, he went back and fixed a bug in the original code and released the updated version to the community for free.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

"I love camels and it never sat well with me that they were the enemy in *Attack Of The Mutant Camels*, so I wrote this whole elaborate back story about how the camels were rebelling against their oppressors. They were the heroes! With 42 levels, I wasn't necessarily trying to outdo anybody. I just thought, 'If the memory is there, why not fill it up, you know?'"

REVENGE IS SWEET KNOW YOUR ENEMY

CATS AND DOGS
■ This beastly rain is going to hurt, as you try to keep your camel dry from a feline and canine shower. The acid raindrops don't help either.

CND SIGNS
■ Entitled 'This Kiosk Is A Nuclear Free zone', this level is far from peaceful, as you blast a phone box forever forward and dodge CND signs.

WACKY WHACKERS
■ A nod to Eugene Evan's *Wacky Waiters* for the VIC-20, here you face animated canes, intent on slapping your beast's backside.

MANIC MINTER
■ Jeff often put his own likeness into his games and here he hurls tiny explosive camels your way, until you literally kick his arse.

METAGALACTIC LLAMAS BATTLE AT THE EDGE OF TIME

VIC-20, VARIOUS • 1984

They don't name games like this anymore, do they? Jeff again experiments with the mechanics of blasting by allowing you to raise and lower a force field, allowing you to deflect your laser spit to dispatch the nasties falling and crawling towards you. It starts off gently but soon the playfield is a blur of bouncing bullets and baddies and one of the unexpanded VIC's best games.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

"I love the VIC-20 and I didn't want to abandon it. There was something about the sound effects and those big chunky graphics that I really liked. The VIC gave us our first big successes, so I didn't want to just walk away. I felt a loyalty to the people who still had that machine because not everybody could afford to upgrade to the Commodore 64 straight away and it would be a bit disappointing if suddenly there were no games at all for the VIC. That's why I did *Hellgate* after this, as well."

ANCIPITAL

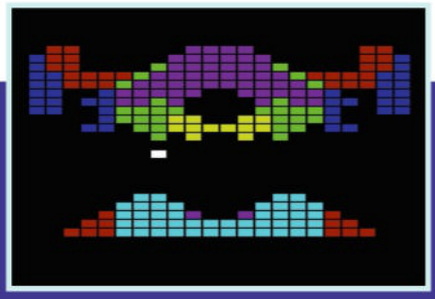
C64 • 1984

Cippy, a half-man, half-goat hybrid, was first spotted ambling along the surface of the planets in *Sheep In Space*. Here, he's made the star, and it marks a departure for Jeff in terms of game design. Yes, there's a lot of blasting but also an exploration element as you navigate your way through the expansive map plus a little brainwork as you work out how exactly to open the doors in each room. Llamasoft trivia: *Zzap!64*'s Gary Penn was the first to complete it!

JEFF'S MEMORIES

"I'd never done anything remotely platformy and I liked the idea of being able to walk on the walls and that kind of stuff. I also liked the idea of it being a bit of a puzzle game rather than a straightforward shooter. So yeah, combining all that together seemed to be a fun thing to do. Plus, I could get even more levels into it – 100 this time! I wanted to give people a nice big game that they could sink a lot of time into."

PSYCHEDELIA

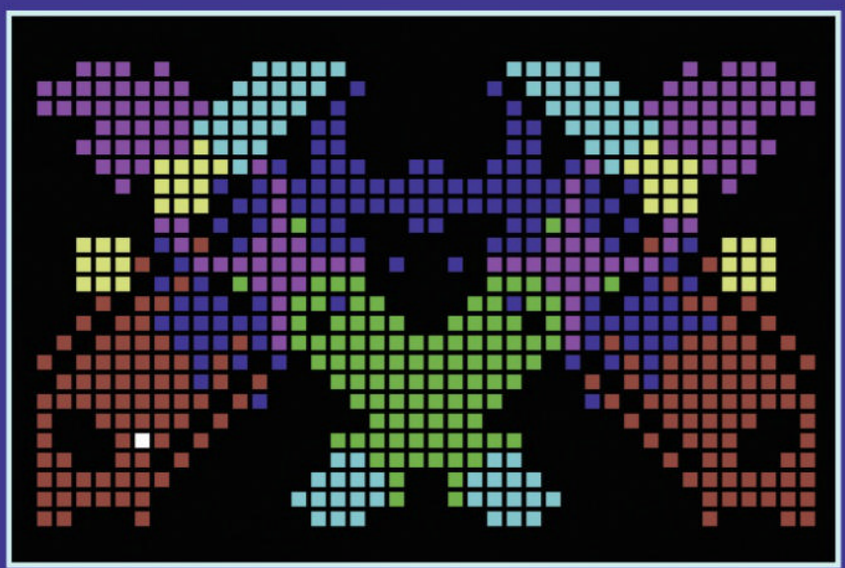


C64, VARIOUS • 1984

For those who eagerly awaited each Llamasoft release in the Eighties, this light synth was something of a curveball, albeit a very colourful and trippy one. Creating pretty pixellated patterns on-screen was fun but where was the game? That was Jeff's point – this showed what else you could do with your micro and was the first step on a fascinating path for him, which he is still enthusiastically skipping along: a psychedelic brick road, if you will.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

"I always had the idea of some kind of machine to externalise the things I would see in my head, ever since I was 11 years old and first listened to Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side Of The Moon*. I was out for a run one day and this algorithm popped into my head, so I tried it and yeah, it was interesting. I showed it to my friends and they thought it was really cool. We'd all sit around and smoke dope and play with it. I'm working on a new light synth at the moment and it's absolutely the best thing I've ever made."



FOLLOW THE LIGHT

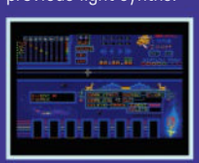
JEFF'S LIGHT SYNTH JOURNEY

COLOURSPACE

■ Jeff's first update to his light synth concept was for the Atari 8-bits in 1985. The following year he'd make further improvements for the 16-bit version.

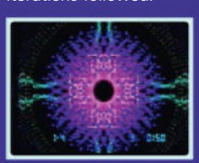
TRIP-A-TRON

■ A significant step up in terms of functionality and visual wizardry – Jeff quips that he took longer to write the manual than he'd taken to write his previous light synths.



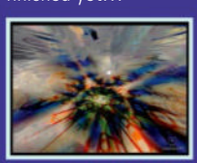
VLM-O

■ An abbreviation of 'Virtual Light Machine', Jeff dubs this a 'visualiser', as it was powered by external audio rather than a user 'playing it'. Three more iterations followed.



NEON

■ Built into the Xbox 360 and the inspiration for *Space Giraffe*, this is the one that brought Jeff's vision to the masses. And the journey hasn't finished yet…



SHEEP IN SPACE

C64 • 1984

We make no secret of our love for this game. In typical Jeff style, he takes a classic arcade title, in this case *Defender*, and plays around with the formula, setting the action between two planets, each exerting a gravitational pull on ewe (see what we did there?) There's a lovely rhythm to each wave as frenetic blasting gives way to a search for a suitable refuelling spot before you go in pursuit of those final charge-carrying baddies to prevent the planets exploding.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

"I was getting into the whole idea of gravity, something I'd started with *Revenge Of The Mutant Camels*. For *Sheep In Space*, I had the bullets curving in so you could shoot things on the ground and the speed being controlled by the distance of your sheep from the ground. I liked how you had to bring your sheep in low and it slows down so you can land… and if you eat too much, it explodes! I like the humour, the music… it was just a nice little confluence of ideas."

MAMA LLAMA

C64 • 1985

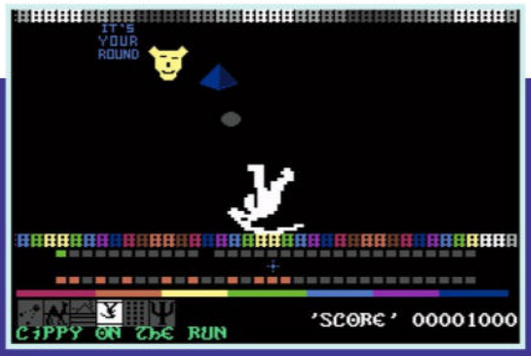
Jeff's willingness to try new things, especially in terms of controls, is part of what made each Llamasoft release an event, particularly during his prolific period in the mid-Eighties. And sometimes it didn't quite click with gamers. Famously slated by *Zzap!64*, it led to a spat between Jeff and the magazine – which was awkward as he was also a contributor. All was soon forgiven, though in retrospect, this game does feel like an interesting idea not quite fully realised.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

"It was an experimental time for me. I had this idea of trying to control the llama and the little floating droid at the same time. I think I possibly did [push it too far] because, you know, the controls were a bit peculiar, like having to press the button to disengage. Yeah, there's a bit too much [going on] for a lot of people but if you don't try new things out, then you might miss a really good idea."

BATALYX

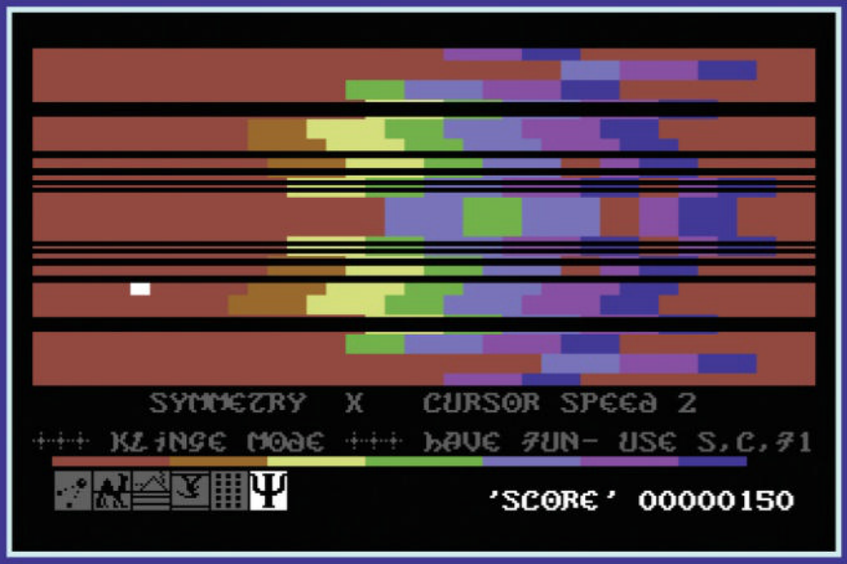
C64 • 1985



This collection of five minigames (six if you count the cut down version of light synth *Psychedelia*, which allows some well-earned chill out time) allowed Jeff to revisit several of his past titles and play around with some new ideas too. Being able to jump between games and tackling them in any order you choose was quite unusual at the time and there is lots to enjoy here, even if some of the more abstract concepts can take some getting used to.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

"I wanted to experiment with the idea of having games which all got more difficult over time and the player could choose to switch to the ones which they found most difficult early on, so as to get through those levels quicker. I just liked the idea of that kind of player agency in the game, which I don't think I'd seen before at that point."



MINI MAXI BATALYX'S FIVE MINIGAMES

HALLUCIN-O-BOMBLETS

■ Take a little bit of *Asteroids*, a lot of blasting and add the complication of having to use your bullets to manoeuvre your ship.

AMC II

■ Jeff polishes one of his early hits and offers a smoother, more colourful version of this homage to *The Empire Strikes Back* for the Atari 2600.

THE ACTIVATION OF IRIDIS BASE

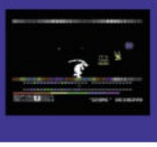
■ The most visually striking of the minigames, as you hop atop a camel and head for the pyramid whilst playing the classic handheld, *Simon*.

CIPPY ON THE RUN

■ The Goatoid from *Ancipital* returns, dashing along grey floors and ceilings until all have been turned a brighter shade of rainbow.

SYNCRO II

■ The trickiest of the five in our opinion, this requires you to 'trap' floating spheres by rotating squares in exactly the opposite direction.



PHOTON STORM

ATARI ST, AMIGA • 1990

Jeff was an early adopter of the 16-bit micros and produced several titles for the Amiga and Atari ST in the latter half of the Eighties and into the Nineties, including this space shooter. Loosely based on Williams' *Sinistar*, with some elements of *Stargate* and a little of the obscure vector game, *Aztarac*, it is one of his lesser-known titles and worth booting up to see how his mind was working in what could be seen as a period of transition for Llamasoft.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

"The motivation for this was primarily to see if I could make an arcade game which was entirely controlled by the mouse. It is kind of inspired by *Sinistar* and you can tell that's where I'm taking the main game elements from, but I had to have my little 3D trippy bit, where you went through the rings, as well. The game was originally called *Atomic Tadpoles Versus Savage Mutant Weirdos From Basingstoke*, which I suppose tells you something."

LLAMATRON: 2112

1991 • ATARI ST, AMIGA

This wonderful game is not just a tribute to the mighty *Robotron: 2084*, a game Jeff and any self-respecting arcade gamer rightly reveres. It offers a far more forgiving experience than the original, allowing a longer and in some ways deeper experience, as befitting a computer game rather than a coin-op. By giving it away for free and asking for a voluntary contribution, it also endeared Llamasoft to fans old and new.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

"Did it save Llamasoft? Absolutely. I took it to various publishers but nobody was interested. Then we released it as shareware and we had this amazing influx of people sending us money and writing letters to us, saying how lovely it was that we'd given them the entire game and trusted them to pay. It was so heartwarming. The whole industry was changing and I was feeling kind of left behind, wondering if there was a place for somebody like me in it anymore, and this made me think, 'Yeah, there is, and I should carry on.'"

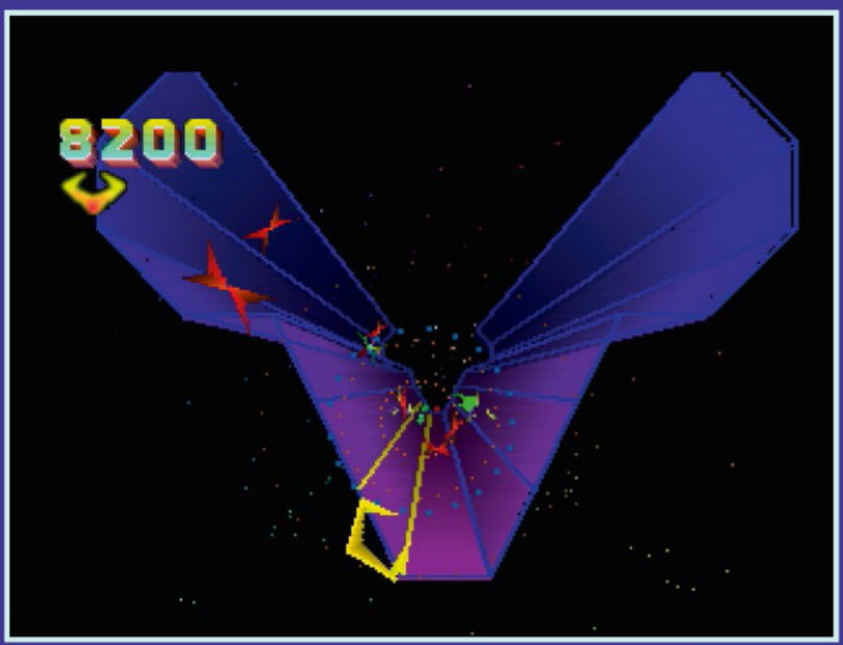
TEMPEST 2000

ATARI JAGUAR, VARIOUS • 1994

Even gamers unaware of Jeff's work in the Eighties and who never owned a Jaguar will probably have heard of this and hopefully have played it too. He keeps everything that makes Dave Theurer's original great and adds a whole heap of wild visuals, banging audio and ingenuous new play modes. Jeff would revisit *Tempest* regularly over the subsequent years and though *TxK* remains our favourite, it's hard not to have a soft spot for this initial sensory overload.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

"It was only when the music went in and everything started to sync really well together that I thought, 'Yeah, this feels really nice.' Some of the guys at Atari had seen my previous versions and hadn't thought they were very good, so I had no idea it might do well. It was only when it was on final test and some [Atari people] came back from the winter CES [Consumer Electronics Show] and told me it had won Best Game. I'm like, 'Fucking hell, really? What the fuck!' I was totally surprised."



TEMPEST FOREVER

MORE LLAMASOFT TAKES ON ATARI'S CLASSIC

TEMPEST 3000

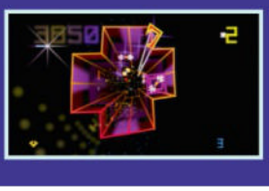
■ Calling it the Nuon's best game seems like damning with faint praise, given the console's short life and minuscule library, but it's the one reason to hunt down a machine. Jeff turns everything up to 11, grinning as he goes.

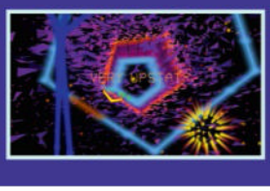
TXK

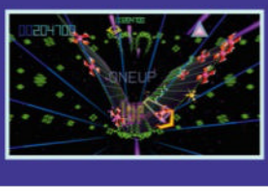
■ A perfect match for the PlayStation Vita's gorgeous OLED screen, this is handheld gaming at its finest. Atari initially took the hump and threatened legal action but thankfully a deal was worked out and more tube shooting was to follow.

TEMPEST 4000

■ Jeff told us he's "all *Tempest*ed out" but if this proves to be his final iteration, it's an impressive swansong. Ivan added he would like to produce a VR version for the PS5 before they finally say farewell. We would love that, even if it makes our head hurt.







DEFENDER 2000

ATARI JAGUAR • 2005

The success of *Tempest 2000* led to Jeff joining Atari and leaving Wales for the considerably sunnier California. It seemed like a perfect match, given his love of Atari's glorious back catalogue, but being an employee rather than a freelancer curtailed his creative freedom and this version of Eugene Jarvis' superlative shooter is not Jeff's finest work. After leaving Atari in 1996, he joined VM Labs to work on the Nuon, before returning to his beloved Wales in 1997.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

"They [Atari] wanted lots of artwork, loads of parallax scrolling layers and they wanted big ships. The whole thing about *Defender* is that things aren't big! We're coming back to the idea of the ship being the size of a bus when everything needs to be small for the game to really work. I was an employee now and I got lent on. I should have stayed in Wales and done it freelance and I think it would have been a lot better game."

SPACE GIRAFFE

XBOX 360, PC • 2007

It is significant that Jeff names this as his personal favourite game amongst his extensive back catalogue. It has its roots in the unreleased GameCube title, *Unity*, and was a direct result of Llamasoft producing Neon for the Xbox 360, the visualiser embedded in the console. It was also the first game which Ivan collaborated on and marked a new chapter for Llamasoft, making it special for many reasons.

JEFF AND IVAN'S MEMORIES

"**JEFF:** It brought together the two things I love the most: games and light synths. It used the light synth in a very creative way to influence the gameplay and it forced players to open up their senses. It was very divisive but I'm kind of proud of that because the people who loved it, they really loved it."

IVAN: I know I'm good in all the technical aspects of things and the more I can do my side, the more space I can leave Jeff to do all the stuff. I think we found out quite soon a way to fit together and work together."

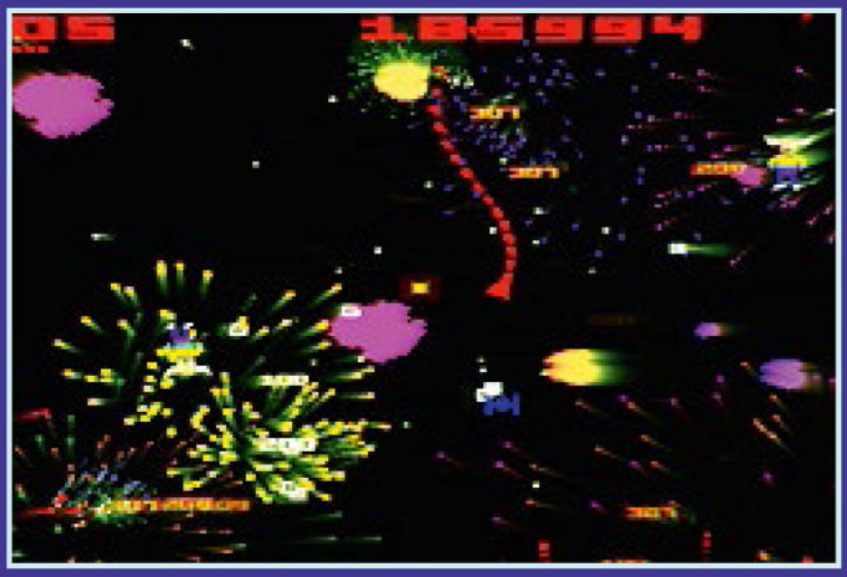
MINOTAUR RESCUE

IOS • 2011

It seemed like a great idea – take a retro computer or console and create a game in the visual style of that machine, then release it on Apple's burgeoning App Store to a worldwide audience. Llamasoft's first foray was this spin on *Asteroids*, with the look of an Atari 2600 release and some great multiplayer modes. Sadly, despite all nine releases getting positive reviews, the brutal economics of the iOS market meant "they made about 50p each" says Jeff, bitterly.

JEFF'S MEMORIES

"I missed the 8-bit days where you could do four or five games in a year and I thought it would be nice to do a series of small games. I'm proud of all the games I made for the Minotaur Project. They're all excellent games in their own right and got good reviews but my frustration with it is that the market was so terrible for selling them because Apple had completely devalued games by that point, so people expected games for 69 fucking pence."



THE MINOTAUR PROJECT

FIVE MORE LLAMASOFT IOS GAMES

GOAT UP

■ Memorably described as "*Doodle Jump* on absinthe" this addictive platformer has you kissing billy goats and leading your growing family ever higher.

SUPER OX WARS

■ With a nod to Namco's *Xevious* and the colour-swapping mechanic of *Ikaruga*, this shooter was inspired by a Brazilian festival celebrating the ox.

FIVE A DAY

■ Think *Time Pilot* but made for the Commodore 64 with a clear dietary message, this offers some chilled-out blasting with a fruity theme. It's another solid Llamasoft blaster.

MINOTRON: 2112

■ The title says it all, really. Jeff returns to *Llamatron* but gives it an Intellivision makeover and includes Kevin Toms as a boss. Obviously.

CAVERNS OF MINOS

■ Jeff goes back to the Atari 8-bit for inspiration in this mash-up of *Caverns Of Mars* and the even older *Lunar Lander*. It's another gem that's now hard to play.

POLYBIUS

PLAYSTATION 4, PC • 2017

Llamasoft has made a career out of revamping classic arcade games but here it takes a classic arcade myth as inspiration. *Polybius* was supposedly a government-backed mind-control experiment in game form, conducted in 1981 by shady CIA-types on unsuspecting arcade goers. Jeff and Ivan had great fun playing with the urban legend and created something mind-blowing, especially when played in VR. It's also arguably their first racing game and Ivan's favourite of their work.

JEFF AND IVAN'S MEMORIES

JEFF: We had to do this demo to people at Sony which was kind of stressful as they would decide if this project was going to happen. This guy played it for about five minutes without saying anything. Then he took his headset off and said, 'I felt like a Jedi.' I thought, 'Yeah, job done.'"

IVAN: We were among the very first companies to ever get our hands on the PSVR. We had a sequence of prototypes and the initial ones were kind of unusable. I'm glad to say we had a bit of input into the development process by telling Sony what we didn't like!"

MOOSE LIFE

PLAYSTATION 4, PC • 2020

Voxels, voxels everywhere… though produced for thoroughly modern consoles and with the VR version very much at the forefront of the design process, this has a lovely old-skool feel. The simple, blocky graphics and eye-popping explosions recall the golden age of the arcades, all done with Llamasoft's trademark British wit. Top hole!

JEFF AND IVAN'S MEMORIES

JEFF: Oculus sent out some documentation and examples of the banners you could put up on their store page to sell stuff, and one of them was just a picture of a moose, called 'moose life'. I thought someone should make a game called that and that somebody should be me; though the main character is actually a deer! Look at its antlers! But I couldn't call it *Deer Life*, could I?"

IVAN: All those particle explosions! I mean, come on, there is no game of Jeff's where there is not some sort of particle explosion. He always designs his games without any sound, because when you add sound, everything gets better, so he wants to get the playability right first."

AKKA ARRH

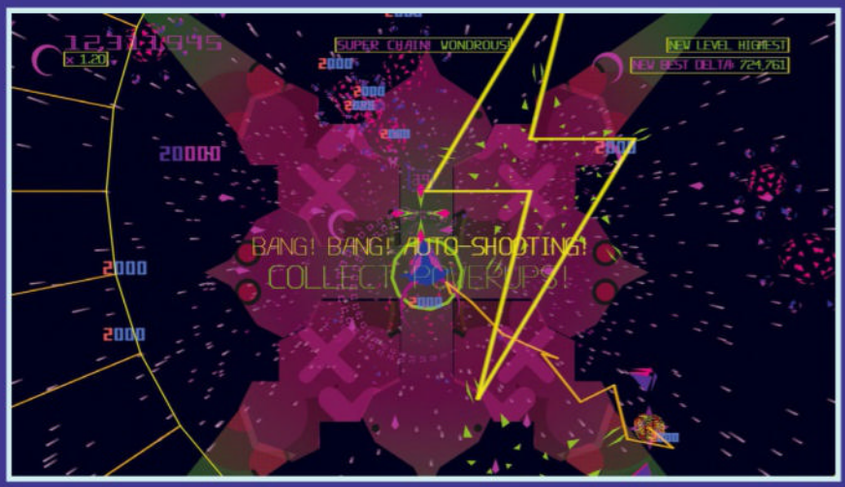
PC, VARIOUS • 2023

This unreleased Atari game was developed in the early Eighties and Mike Hally, the designer of *Gravitar*, had a hand in its design, which explains the zooming in and out mechanic. Jeff and Ivan took the promising concept and made a compelling shooter, which requires strategic use of your arsenal over mindless blasting. The pair have now been given the keys to the Atari vault, so keep an eye out for more updates of this ilk.

JEFF AND IVAN'S MEMORIES

JEFF: A lot of Atari's big games have already been updated but I like looking at some of the more obscure ones. Some are very interesting but a bit flawed, like the original *Akka Arrh*. I enjoyed the challenge of trying to improve it and make it a bit more playable."

IVAN: The biggest challenge for me was porting this to the PS5 because it supports the PSVR2 which is quite a bit more complex than the PSVR. I had to learn a lot… and in record time! Is it a challenge to implement Jeff's ideas? Oh no. If anything, I push him to be more psychedelic."



LLAMASOFT FOREVER

DON'T MISS DIGITAL ECLIPSE'S LATEST COMPILATION

Llamasoft: The Jeff Minter Story should be available now and is the best current way to enjoy the vast majority of Jeff's work. Created by the digital archivists at Digital Eclipse, it's a whistle-stop tour through Jeff's impressive career and features 42 games across a variety of systems, from the VIC-20 to Atari's Jaguar. As with *Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration*, it's best to think of *Llamasoft: The Jeff Minter Story* as a digital museum. You'll find lots of fascinating information about his games and work process and can instantly dive into games as you explore the compilation's many timelines. It's a fascinating way to experience the work of a true gaming legend.

Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island

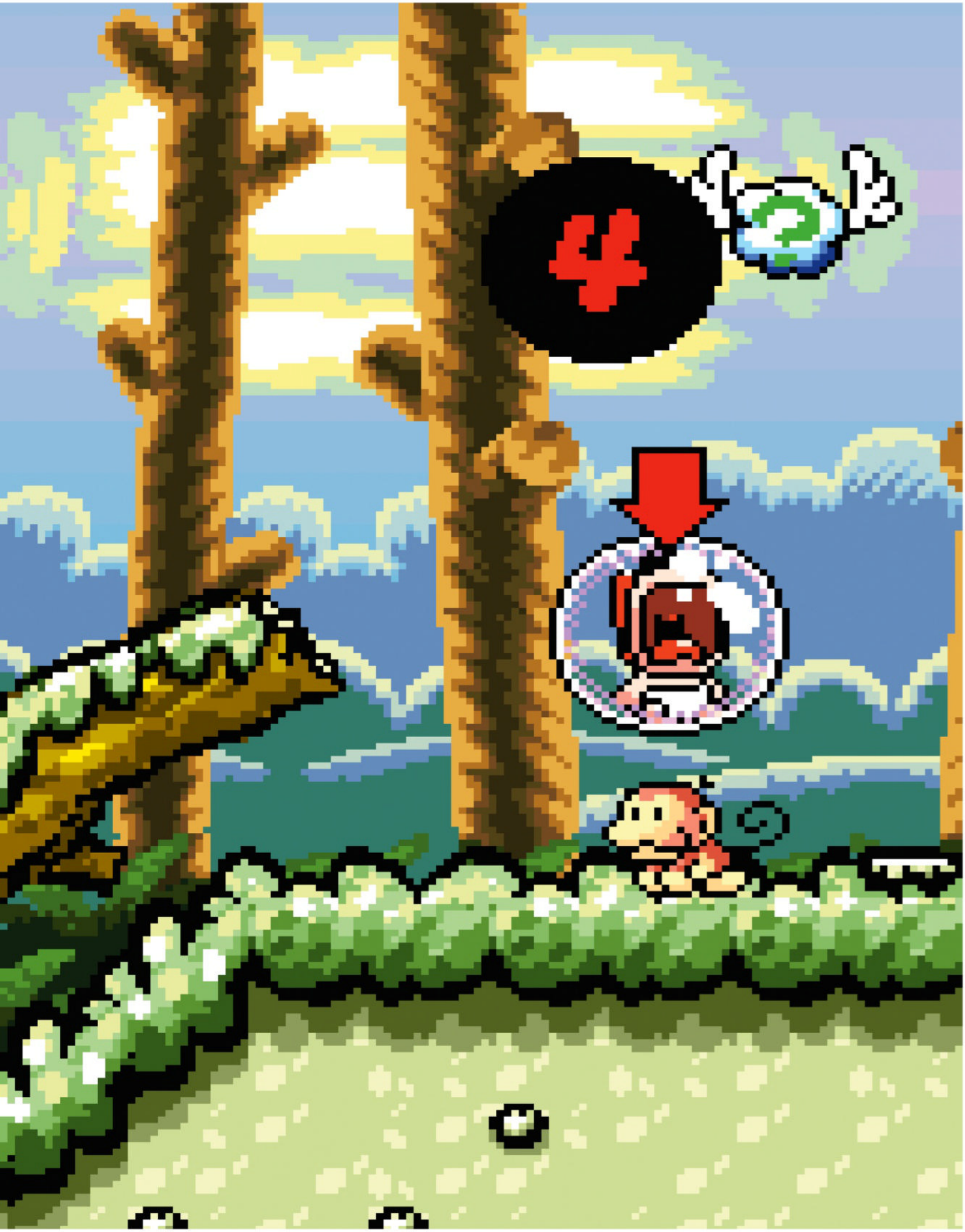
THE LEGEND OF MARIO: TEARS OF THE INFANT

» SNES » 1995 » NINTENDO EAD

I used to do a fair bit of babysitting as a teenager, mostly because I'd already left secondary school when my youngest sisters were born. I never minded this, but it's always possible that something will go wrong when kids are involved, and for some reason they seemed to view me being in charge as an open invitation to be sick. The youngest was the worst – she'd been in her cot and threw up all over her own face, then became completely inconsolable after I got her in the bath. I would genuinely have preferred her to vomit in *my* face than have to make an emergency phone call, but the relentless crying ultimately wore me down and I summoned my dad and stepmum back from their night out.

If you've played *Yoshi's Island*, you'll know why I can't help but remember that experience whenever I play it. You've got to carry Baby Mario to the goal on Yoshi's back, and if he gets hit along the way, he'll drop the baby and have a few seconds to recover him before he disappears and a life is lost. I always saw that cycle of dropping and recovery as a neat twist on the concept of *Sonic*'s rings, but some people hate the mechanic because Baby Mario cries as long as Yoshi is separated from his infant charge.

On one hand, I get it – the sound of babies crying is annoying. But isn't that the entire point? We're wired to recognise it as a distress signal, a noise to be heard as little as possible and resolved quickly whenever encountered, because hearing it means *something is wrong*. In a game where getting hit doesn't carry a particularly heavy gameplay penalty, Baby Mario's cries serve as the emotional incentive to avoid it. Either way, I'm fine with it – if only because quietening Baby Mario isn't impossible like calming my little sister was.


4

ULTIMATE GUIDE
COUNTER

WHETHER IT'S THE TENS OF THOUSANDS STILL PLAYING COUNTER-STRIKE 1.6 DAILY OR THE MILLIONS PLAYING ALONG WITH EACH NEW MODERNISATION, THE ETERNAL BATTLE BETWEEN TERRORISTS AND COUNTER-TERRORISTS HAS BECOME A PERMANENT PART OF SHOOTER HISTORY. RETRO GAMER EXPLORES HOW THIS ICONIC FPS BECAME AN INDUSTRY MAINSTAY

WORDS BY ADAM BARNES

Arguably more than any other genre, the first-person shooter has perhaps seen more evolution and change throughout the history of the industry than any other. Some of that is down to technological improvements, some is a result of innovative game design, while some is even the fickle cause of ever-changing trends. But what's particularly interesting for those that have paid attention is how the humble FPS hasn't gradually changed via subtle improvements and steady progression, but in periodic leaps and bounds as one major release drops and suddenly changes everything. *Counter-Strike* is one such game, which put the nail in the coffin for the classic arena-style deathmatches of *Quake* and its ilk, championing a new way of playing online shooters.

Even on an aesthetic level, *Counter-Strike* was a pioneer in pushing the industry away from shooting aliens, robots or demons and closer towards more realistic modern settings. Heck, even *Half-Life*, which skewed closer towards realistic gun mechanics and whose engine *Counter-Strike* was built upon, still chose to pit players against an invading force of aliens. That's not to say that it was the first to shun the typical sci-fi schlock, it was after all inspired in varying degrees by *Rainbow Six*, *Police Quest: SWAT* and *Virtua Cop*. But it's clear that gamers were ready for a bit more realism in their gunplay, as seen with the popularity of the likes of *GoldenEye 007* and *Medal Of Honor*.

While *Counter-Strike*'s arsenal may have been disguised by fictional names, it still featured models, animations and accurate controls for the likes of the Beretta, the AK-47, MP5, Desert Eagle and many other familiar names that most of us wouldn't have a deep-seeded knowledge of if it wasn't for videogames addling our minds. It was unheard of at the time (aside from *Rainbow Six*, which released one year prior), but *Counter-Strike* was played by so many that the previously held upper management concern about the public's concerns of 'realistic violence' in videogames was cast in doubt, and from there a slew of modern day FPS games began to trickle out.

And of course this was a multiplayer-only title, at least in its early days, which might not have counted for much if not for the fact that here, too, *Counter-Strike* was throwing out ▶

» [PC] First things first, pop out that knife to get you to the frontline of battle quicker. You'll be mocked if you don't.

» [PC] Modern day *Counter-Strike* is so finely tuned that those still playing the classic version play each round on autopilot.

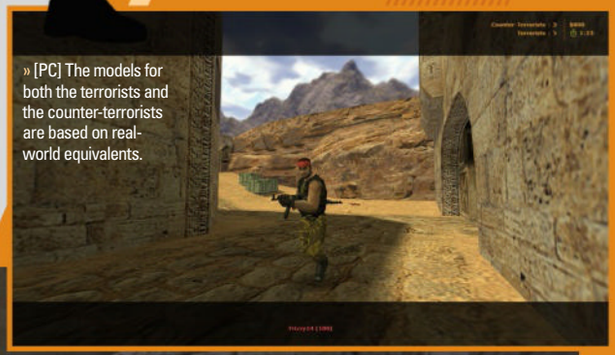
» [PC] Some players prefer the intense, more tactical games of 5v5, while others prefer 32 players in a full free-for-all action.

» [PC] The addition of spectator mode was only able to work once Minh Le was hired by Valve; up until that point, he couldn't quite crack it.

STRIKE

SPAWNED FROM MODS

FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS THESE IMPRESSIVE GAMES WERE BORN



» [PC] The models for both the terrorists and the counter-terrorists are based on real-world equivalents.

» [PC] There's a lot that is iconic about classic *Counter-Strike*, but that flood of item purchases that rings out at the start of each round is especially nostalgic.

TEAM FORTRESS 2

■ *Counter-Strike* and *Team Fortress 2* have shared histories: both had a heritage in *Quake* modding, both were released as mods for *Half-Life* and both had their mod teams hired by Valve and incorporated into the company and went on to become one of the most recognisable shooters in gaming history.

DEFENCE OF THE ANCIENTS

■ Built on *Warcraft III*'s engine and leveraging its hero character system to build an RPG-like multiplayer experience, *Dota* became so widely popular that it would directly lead to the creation of *League Of Legends*, *Dota 2* and from there countless other MOBAs in a craze reminiscent of the RTS boom of the Nineties.

THE FORGOTTEN CITY

■ While not as well-known as some of the others in this list, *The Forgotten City* is a narrative-driven murder mystery *Skyrim* mod set in Ancient Rome. We won't spoil it, but know that in 2016 it became the first ever mod to win a Writers' Guild award for its script, and was released as a standalone game in 2021 to unanimous praise for its story. Play this one.

THE STANLEY PARABLE

■ Playing as the eponymous Stanley, you'll navigate the corridors of his office trying to figure out why, suddenly, he's all alone. The twist is the fact that Stanley's actions are constantly being narrated by an ethereal voiceover, and through that, a deeper-than-you-expected twisting and mysterious meta-narrative unfolds. Not bad for a *Half-Life 2* mod.

DAYZ

■ Dean Hall created a mod for *ArmA 2* that proved to be so popular that it would end up overshadowing the base game it was built on. *DayZ* was a zombie survival mod built on *ArmA*'s hyper realistic military gunplay, and was a direct precursor to the once-trendy battle royale subgenre of shooter.

DECONSTRUCTING DUST

IS THIS THE MOST ICONIC FPS MAP OF ALL TIME?

DUST-UP IN THE DESERT

Dust and its Middle Eastern setting actually originates from the cancelled *Team Fortress 2: Brothers In Arms*. Screenshots of this never-to-be-released Valve sequel were actually used by the map's creator, Dave Johnson, to recreate textures used in Dust.

ALPHA PROTOCOL

With only two entrances into bomb site A, if the CTs can get there quickly enough to defend it the Terrorists will have a tough time planting the bomb here.

PEEK-A-BOO

The archways and doorways of Dust add an iconic look and feel to the map, but also give the opportunity for those handy with a sniper rifle to hold their positions securely.

BETA BOMB

Bomb site B, which is also the CT spawn, is intentionally protected with these weapon crates that litter de_dust and are an iconic visual element for the map.

THREEWAY

Dust's three lanes all interconnecting into one another gave the map a more competitive flow than any other *CS* map. There's a reason its layout hasn't really changed since CS1.6.

YOU GO FIRST

Underpass (originally and inexplicably known as Bridge) was the most deadly part of the map, attackable from multiple avenues and with very limited safe cover points.

FORTRESS FOUNDATION

'DaveJ' would start with recreating the screenshots from the *Team Fortress 2* pre-release assets, even down to the layout of the buildings. From there the map was expanded out.

» [PC] The pressure's on when you know you're the last man standing and all your team are waiting to see if you don't balls it up.

the rulebook. *Quake* was still the flavour of the day when it came to online FPS gaming of the time, and this sort of twitch-shooting deathmatch was pumped into any new FPS that could handle it. Here *Counter-Strike*'s goal of replicating real-world special forces operations followed through into the way each game was played. The big twist was the Round-Based system, which meant no respawning until after the current round has been won. At a time when the standard multiplayer life from respawn to gibs and to respawn again was roughly 30 seconds, the thought of having to *wait* to have your go again was completely alien. But naturally this just made things all the more competitive – and tense – since one wrong move meant you're sitting this one out as you watch your team suffer without you. Adding to this was the fact that your gear is actually purchased at the start of each round, meaning you'll scale up in power as the match rolls on and therefore smart use of your available funds was as critical to your performance in the game as your skills. This extra layer of strategic depth has since evolved into a pretty robust economy as players need to figure out whether they really need that extra flashbang or if they'd rather save their current funds to unlock their favourite gun in the next round.

» [PC] Each round begins with an artillery of cooked grenades at the most likely assault points. You soon learn to join in.

Despite these core concepts, steady evolution has always been pretty much the modus operandi for *Counter-Strike*. It was by no means released as a flawless and perfect multiplayer FPS, what with it being developed as a *Half-Life* mod by two college students. But even from its initial beta through to release and later patches, *Counter-Strike* was constantly changing and reforming based not only on the players' feedback, but the contributions of the community. Back when it was still in beta there was no Bomb Defusal mode, for example, and instead the primary mode was to find and rescue hostages. The gun was on the left instead of the right, there was yet to be a knife added and maps even had terminals through which you could directly watch a camera for a live feed of the battle as it happened. The betas were a chance for experimentation, too, such as co-creator Minh Le's inclusion of vehicles, *Half-Life*'s mounted machine guns, and even a Commander Mode that randomly selected a player on each side as the commander with special radio commands.

The changes came quickly, with Minh and fellow creator Jess Cliffe responding to all the feedback they were getting. Even in its early days it was clear that *Counter-Strike* was set for global fame and as the community grew, so too did the number of volunteers wanting to help out with the mod's creation, changing the situation from Minh and Jess having to practically beg people to playtest it to having an overabundance of content and additions to choose from.

Practically all of the game's maps were created by its dedicated players, and so many were submitted on a regular basis that they

COUNTER-STRIKE 2

A SEQUEL AFTER 24 YEARS? WELL… NOT QUITE…

Counter-Strike has been a funny one. It's not so much that sequels are developed and released, but the same core game is gradually updated over the course of years and even decades until, creaking under the weight of the engine it's powered by, an all-new game is released. That's what happened with *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* and it's what happened in September 2023 when the game was updated to become an all-new game: *Counter-Strike 2*.

That was the main bugbear for the community, since through this process Valve essentially chopped off the head of its behemoth FPS so that another could grow in its place. *CS:GO* became unavailable overnight, and the players were not happy. Add in a high number of bugs and instability issues and the player review bombing on its Steam store page hardly seems surprising.

This aside, the changes have been for the better. Everything is more refined, there are some core system changes that the hardcore will appreciate as well as some technical server-based code that means the experience can be more consistent for all players. The updated visuals have finally brought the admittedly ageing *CS:GO* into the modern era, though the changes to the layouts of the maps themselves range from just visual enhancements (Dust II, of course) to complete overhauls (such as with Inferno). Ultimately, *Counter-Strike 2* is an improvement and will likely end up an improvement to *CS:GO*, but this rocky start hasn't been Valve's finest hour.

STRIKE FORCE

HOW HAS COUNTER-STRIKE EVOLVED OVER THE YEARS?

COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO

The first sequel to the original had an erratic history, first revealed in 2001 and in development at Rogue Entertainment. After that studio closed, *Condition Zero* went to Gearbox, then Ritual Entertainment before ending up at Turtle Rock who finally kicked it out in March 2004. It was noteworthy due to its 20 single-player missions.

COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

Named as such for the simple fact that it was *Counter-Strike* ported over to Valve's new Source engine that powered *Half-Life 2*. *Source* would ultimately release just a few months after *Condition Zero* due to the latter's prolonged development. It would go on to become the de facto version of the game for a stint.

COUNTER-STRIKE NEO

An arcade version of *CS* developed by Namco Bandai, which retains the core gameplay but with a completely reworked aesthetic. Since it was exclusive to Japanese internet cafes, the gritty counter-terrorism vibe was swapped out for anime cyborgs and colourful 'terrorists' (known as CSF, and were actually the good guys).

COUNTER-STRIKE ONLINE

Exclusive to Asian territories and developed by Nexon, *Counter-Strike Online* retained the core elements of the game but added Zombie mode, Scenario battles against AI and even PvPvE battles. Given its market, the game was free-to-play and funded by microtransactions.

» [PC] These days a lot of servers are customised with their own rulesets, skins, game modes and even sound effects and soundtracks.

» [PC] While there were numerous maps made and officially released for the original *Counter-Strike*, these days you'll only see a handful on active servers.

» [PC] Knowing when to save your money or spend on important equipment is a decisive part of victory at a higher level of play.

even had to go through a process of selecting out the ones 'worthy' to be included. Yep, even Dust was a community-created addition.

Even when it was just in beta, Valve was already tuned into the fact that *Counter-Strike* was garnering a pretty sizeable community of players with the numbers growing exponentially on a week-by-week basis. Those two college students quickly found themselves with jobs at Valve, and *Counter-Strike* was incorporated officially into the studio. Naturally this helped with visibility, but even before its release *CS* (as it's affectionately known) was being played globally in the hundreds of thousands. Valve put as much behind it as it could, but that grassroots, community-led development was always its heart. Things stabilised at the release of version 1.6, which remained the 'ultimate' version of *CS* for several years. It's been said before by Valve that the regular tweaks and updates of *Counter-Strike* was one of the critical reasons for the development of Steam, since it would enable a way for all players to stay up-to-date with as little impact and downtime as possible. With all this attention and competitive play, it's not surprising that *Counter-Strike* has become one of the most important games for esports in the industry. Prior to its release there were tournaments for *Quake* and *StarCraft* that had built a sizeable (if albeit exceptional) esports fanbase in South Korea, but nothing had the global competition that *CS* had built. Even to this day it remains one of the mainstream FPS games in the esports scene, and it says a lot that the core gameplay systems haven't really changed since its very first release.

This has been an intentional decision by Valve over the years, which has made changes but often tiny and rarely controversial (the community don't let those ones last very long). The tried and true cliché fits here: if it ain't broke, don't fix it. *Counter-Strike* has been stalwart in its gameplay ever since its early days as a mod; it might've been enhanced through community feedback, but that core concept has proven strong enough to stand the test of time. It encourages teamwork, requires high levels of skill and is thrilling to watch in a competitive environment. It might have received various visual upgrades over the years, but this remains as true now as it did when it first debuted.

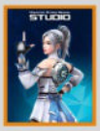
» [PC] Please pity the poor ageing writer who had to join *Counter-Strike* servers against players who still play the game daily.

» [PC] Players who were a good shot with a sniper rifle could dominate pretty much any game. Just don't get caught camping if you don't want to be kicked.

COUNTER-STRIKE: GLOBAL OFFENSIVE

Though it was still built on the Source engine, *CS:GO* gave the game a new lick of paint and refined the gameplay to make up for the eight years since *Source* released. Valve maintained *CS:GO* through steady updates and has turned it into a pretty serious esports title, and switched it to a highly praised free-to-play system in 2018.

COUNTER-STRIKE NEXON: STUDIO



Released in 2013 under the name *Counter-Strike Nexon: Zombies*, this version did have a Classic mode but the emphasis was more on its story-driven Zombie campaign. It renamed in 2019 to coincide with an update that brought Studio Mode, where players can create and share *Minecraft*-esque CS maps.

COUNTER-STRIKE 2

After all these releases, it's a strange choice to call this the second *Counter-Strike* game, but Valve is seemingly allergic to numbers higher than two. *Counter-Strike 2* released in 2023 some 11 years after *CS:GO*, switching to the Source 2 engine with modern visuals and technical improvements under the hood.

DEVELOPER Q&A

THE HISTORY OF COUNTER-STRIKE IN MINH LE'S OWN WORDS…

What was the starting point for *Counter-Strike*?

I had previously worked on a mod called *Action Quake2* that had a lot of elements that I borrowed from. Notably, it had realistic weaponry, and it was a Round-Based game that didn't have player respawning. Shortly after finishing *Half-Life*, Valve announced they would be releasing an SDK that would allow modders to create mods for the game engine. I immediately began creating art assets such as weapons and characters. It took me several months to create an initial prototype. After a few weeks, I was contacted by Jess Cliffe who was a huge fan of *Action Quake2* and had previously hosted a community website that showcased the best user-created levels for *AQ2*. He was quickly able to convince a few mappers to create the initial maps for our very first beta.

What were the inspirations for the game, specifically the unique combat mechanics?

The combat style of *CS* was a mixture of two games that I had enjoyed prior to making *CS*. Those games were *Quake II* and *Rainbow Six*. I loved the high adrenaline fast-paced nature of *Quake II* but I wanted to incorporate that into something that encouraged the tactical movement of *Rainbow Six*, so I settled on a movement speed that was right between those two games. One thing I really wanted to emphasise was a concept called controlled fire, which is where real special force units would usually fire in short bursts and rarely fire their weapons in full auto. I made it so the guns in *Counter-Strike* were fairly accurate for those first few shots and then became a random mess afterwards.

Did the core design of the game and its Round-Based multiplayer change during development?

I think the biggest change the game went through over the course of the betas was the introduction of the monetary system, which was introduced quite early thankfully. Also, we introduced many game modes that never really stuck with the players, such as VIP Escort or Prison Breakout. I do remember trying to implement vehicles into the game and I spent a great deal of time trying to get it right but never could properly implement it due to my poor understanding of the *Half-Life* engine. Vehicles would have required an entirely new game mode as most of the maps in *Counter-Strike* were far too small for vehicles to make an impact on gameplay.

Was there ever a point where you felt like you might have something special on your hands?

Not really. Everyone on the team had really mild expectations of what the general playerbase would feel towards our game. I think part of it was because we were playtesting it with a small group of friends (four or five people) and we couldn't really see the full potential of the game until we first played on a public server with 32 players. It was incredible how much more fun it was with more players and that was the point at which we realised that *Counter-Strike* had a lot of potential. In fact, many people these days prefer the small 5v5 nature of competitive *CS*, but I'm not a fan of it. I much prefer the chaotic action of 10v10 *Counter-Strike*.

» [PC] There have been many imitators over the years, but *Counter-Strike* has remained the leader in multiplayer tactical FPS.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Virtua Racing

» **PLATFORM:** ARCADE » **RELEASED:** 1992 » **DEVELOPER:** SEGA AM2

The pregame map of *Virtua Racing*'s beginner course doesn't give you any indication of the cool setpiece feature located near the end of the track. Until you race around it for the first time, Sega's game keeps you in the dark about the 'Wow!' moment to come. That's not to say that its Big Forest course lacks noteworthy landmarks in the run up to its final bend. There's an impressive stadium near its starting line that gives way to dense forestry. Then there's a meandering stretch that cuts through hills, a pair of ornate bridges and a banked S-bend that tests your driving skills on your first attempt at it. Because this last challenge requires your concentration, when you leave it behind on the way to the final stretch your eyes are on the road ahead. At least they are until your peripheral vision picks up a brightly coloured fairground off to your left, complete with a roller-coaster and Ferris wheel! It's a purely aesthetic feature, but it provides a moment of joy when it first appears on the horizon.

BIO

Created in tandem with Sega's Model 1 arcade system, *Virtua Racing* started life as a proof-of-concept for the then cutting-edge polygon-based hardware. It was so promising that it was developed into a full-blown arcade game, and it ultimately became Sega's debut Model 1 title. In keeping with the firm's long line of popular racing games, *Virtua Racing* became one of the highest grossing coin-ops of 1992 and 1993. It won an award for its innovative new technology, and it pioneered features that became staples of the racing genre.

MORE CLASSIC VIRTUA RACING MOMENTS

Prerace Preludes

There's more going on at *Virtua Racing*'s starting line than a simple countdown. Depending on your chosen mode, you get a pit crew changing your tyres, pigeons scattering as you rev your engine or grid girls strutting towards the trackside.

Points Of View

You can swap between four viewpoints in *Virtua Racing* during races, including one where you can assess the road ahead from a bird's eye view. You can also position the camera just above your car, behind your rear wheels or in your cockpit.

Awesome Audio

With *Virtua Racing*'s music, less is more. Instead of playing tunes throughout each race, its virtual band rocks out for short spells after you reach a checkpoint. This allows you to focus on and react to the sound of your engine and tyres.

Memorable Modes

Rather than being variations of its Beginner mode, *Virtua Racing*'s Medium and Expert modes have different tracks set in different locations. Bay Bridge features the Golden Gate Bridge, while Acropolis has ancient ruins along its roadsides.

"ONE OF THE FOUNDATION STONES OF THIS WORLD WAS YOU SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO BE WHOEVER YOU WANT TO BE"

PETER MOLYNEUX

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** MICROSOFT
- **DEVELOPER:** LIONHEAD STUDIOS/ BIG BLUE BOX STUDIOS
- **RELEASED:** 2004
- **PLATFORM:** XBOX, PC, MAC
- **GENRE:** RPG

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

BLACK & WHITE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 2001

THE MOVIES
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 2005

FABLE II
SYSTEM: XBOX 360
YEAR: 2008

THE MAKING OF FABLE

PETER MOLYNEUX

Peter cofounded Bullfrog in 1987, but left the studio a couple of years after it was bought by Electronic Arts in 1995. He then founded Lionhead, which was purchased by Microsoft in 2005, and in 2012 he departed to set up 22Cans.

JOHN MCCORMACK

John joined Bullfrog after the EA takeover, then left for Big Blue Box, which was later merged into Lionhead. He cofounded the mobile-focussed studio Another Place Productions in 2012, and is currently art director at The Chinese Room in Brighton.

PROMISES, PROMISES

TO CELEBRATE 20 YEARS OF RETRO GAMER, WE LOOK BACK AT AN ICONIC GAME THAT WAS RELEASED IN THE SAME YEAR THE MAGAZINE LAUNCHED. PETER MOLYNEUX AND JOHN MCCORMACK REMEMBER THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF CREATING FABLE, ONE OF THE MOST HYPED GAMES OF 2004, AND ONE OF THE HARDEST TO CREATE

WORDS BY LEWIS PACKWOOD

There are few releases which can be said to have had as much of an impact on the games industry as *Fable*, a title that upended the RPG rulebook by focussing on emergent gameplay rather than grand quests, all with a healthy dose of British humour. Its influence is plain to see in later games like *Mass Effect*, with its choice between good and evil paths, but its creation was far from smooth.

Peter Molyneux traces the origin of *Fable* back to the time when Bullfrog, the company he founded, was developing the 1997 PC game *Dungeon Keeper*. He recalls discussions with designers Mark Healey and Simon and Dene Carter in which they were "moaning about role-playing games and how serious they were", as well as how they were mired in statistics, which "took away from the delight of feeling that you were the hero and feeling that you were going on an adventure". Peter says it was these discussions that Simon and Dene would call back on when they developed the concept for *Fable* years later.

Bullfrog had been bought by Electronic Arts in 1995, and Peter decided to leave the company following the completion of *Dungeon Keeper*, after becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the corporate role he now found himself in, detached from game development. Other Bullfrog employees soon followed his lead, and by 2001 the studio had vanished, fully absorbed into EA. On his departure, Peter set up Lionhead Studios, which was initially run from his house, but soon established offices in Guildford, at the University Of Surrey Research Park. At around this time, Ian Lovett and Simon and Dene Carter also departed EA to set up Big Blue Box Studios, one of a number of 'satellite studios' that all reported to Lionhead. The idea was that each of these studios could work semi-independently, incubating their own game ideas.

Artist John McCormack, left behind at EA, recalls that Simon, Dene and Ian asked him

ACORNS AND OAK TREES AND PETER MOLYNEUX

Over the years, Peter Molyneux has garnered something of a reputation for making exciting claims in interviews about features that subsequently don't make it into the final game, and *Fable* was no exception. At one point, Peter said that *Fable* would feature co-operative multiplayer, for example. But it was another claim that became somewhat infamous. "In particular I got into an awful lot of trouble talking about features like acorns and oak trees," he says.

The claim in question is that a player would be able to plant an acorn in *Fable* and then watch it grow into an oak tree over time. But was this something that Peter came up with in the spirit of the moment, or was it something that was actually being developed at the time? "I'm sure we did discuss it," says Peter. "But whether or not it was discussed and definitely got a stamp of approval to be in the game, that was in doubt."

What's without doubt is that acorn growing definitely didn't make it into the final release. Peter says he can't remember the exact reason why it was dropped, but adds that it would have been "a very expensive feature in terms of memory performance". Charmingly, however, *Fable II* gave a nod to the whole acorn episode by including a mission about growing a single oak tree.

» [PC] John McCormack says that Microsoft were fantastic partners on the original game, and were willing to give Lionhead carte blanche. "They were open to ideas, and they were open to experimentation," he says.

» [Xbox] A very early shot of *Fable*, when it was still known as *Project Ego*.

» [PC] The voice acting in *Fable* was noticeable for featuring a host of regional British accents, whereas many RPGs at the time featured American actors. John McCormack even lent his Scottish burr to some of the bandits.

» [PC] Russell Shaw created *Fable*'s sumptuous soundtrack, but the game's title music was composed by Danny Elfman, and features his distinctive racing strings.

» [Xbox] An early press shot for *Fable*, showing off the scale of the Earth Troll, one of the beasts you could expect to fight in the game.

to come over to Peter's house to view a tech demo built by coder Martin Bell. "I was sold on that immediately because it was an incredibly powerful terraforming engine," he recalls, saying that the plan was to use this engine for a fantasy RPG concept called *Wishworld* that would see epic battles between wizards. It was an easy decision for John to abandon the sinking Bullfrog ship and join the Big Blue Box crew.

Wishworld didn't last long as a concept, however, soon morphing into what would come to be known as *Fable* – although initially it had the working title of *Project Ego*, which referenced the game's central idea. "One of the foundation stones of this world was you should be allowed to be whoever you want to be," says Peter, adding that the appearance of the hero would change over time to reflect their deeds in the world: they might grow horns if they veered towards evil, or develop a halo if they tended towards the good. This alignment could have been easily represented with numbers, but Peter says that this was something they were keen to avoid, harking back to those discussions about stat-heavy RPGs, "Why use numbers when you've got visuals?" The same idea would be used to great effect in Lionhead's debut title *Black & White* in 2001.

In another world, *Fable* could have debuted on the Sega Dreamcast. Peter recalls that in the early days of Big Blue Box, the president of Sega came to his house to discuss a deal, which was derailed by a dog owned by someone who was visiting. Peter remembers that a strange expression came over the president's face, "And then I happened to look under the table, and this Shih Tzu dog was shagging his leg," he says. "I think that was the end of our Dreamcast relationship."

Instead, Lionhead signed a two-game deal with Microsoft for *Fable* and *BC*, the latter of which was being developed by another satellite studio called Intrepid. John says the initial plan was for *Fable* to be a launch title for the Xbox, which was set to debut in Europe in 2002, but this plan was quickly abandoned once it became clear just how prolonged *Fable*'s development would be. The deal "changed everything for us" says John. Up to this point Big Blue Box had been a studio of only around ten people who had been focussed on playful experimentation. Now, all eyes were upon them. "Suddenly we were making the game," says John. "Things started being scheduled, and we'd never even had a schedule before, we just made stuff."

Getting the project off the ground was a tall order. The engine and tools had to be invented from scratch, and the fact that *Fable* would debut on Xbox – when Lionhead and Bullfrog before it had almost exclusively worked on PC – added another headache. The PC benefited from constant improvements in memory and processing power, "But with a console, it's fixed," says Peter, and getting *Fable*'s ambitious ideas to work within those constraints proved tricky.

"We had a sandbox of ideas and we understood what the world was, but we didn't have a story, we didn't have any kind of arc – we had lots of toys," recalls John. "And one of the main toys was an immersive villager reaction system, an AI system that was really complex [and] that ended up influencing the entire game, because it became less about going on adventures and more about what it's like to be a hero and have your actions affect people. That

FURTHER FABLES

THE SUBSEQUENT GAMES IN THE FABLE SERIES

FABLE II

■ The sequel to *Fable* was released for the Xbox 360 in 2008. It's set 500 years after the first game, and it remains the highest rated entry in the *Fable* series on Metacritic. A tie-in title, *Fable II Pub Games*, was released at around the same time on Xbox Live Arcade.

FABLE III

■ The third *Fable* game launched just two years after the second game, and it sees Albion entering the industrial age. The player takes on the role of the child of the hero from *Fable II*, who went on to become the ruler of Albion. A tie-in game, *Fable Coin Golf*, was released for Windows mobile phones in 2011.

FABLE: THE JOURNEY

■ The next *Fable* game was a title for Microsoft's Kinect motion-sensing system whereby players could use their hands to cast magic. It was released at around the same time as the Xbox Live Arcade beat-'em-up *Fable Heroes*, and completing tasks in one game would unlock items in the other.

» [PC] Rather than being a sprawling epic, the world of *Fable* was created on an intimate scale, says John. "The evil that was invading the land was not far away, it was right on the doorstep, and it was affecting your home," he says.

ended up [being] such a technical challenge that that was the thing that took the most time."

Getting the sandbox gameplay of *Fable* to work involved endless trial and error, says John, although it could also be joyful. "I've never worked on a game where everybody was crowded around people's desks laughing as much as we did," he says. Testing out all of the various possible interactions in the game would often throw up unexpectedly hilarious results, which the developers would sometimes account for by adding extra dialogue. "It was almost like the game had a life of its own and we were reacting to it," says John. "We built a world and it was talking to us."

John recalls that the movies *Labyrinth* and *The Dark Crystal* were big influences on *Fable*, as well as the Jim Henson TV series *The StoryTeller*, and the overall aim was to reflect the darkness of European fairy tales. "Dene in particular had a very clear vision of what was right and what was wrong for Albion," says John. "He's probably one of the strongest creative directors I've worked with."

The distinctively chunky style of *Fable*'s characters originated from character artist Damian Buzugbe, while John pioneered the look of the buildings. "We wanted everything to be grounded like a tree," says John. "The buildings are thicker at the bottom, then taper, then go back out." John also had a hand in designing many of *Fable*'s monsters, and he says the team was encouraged to deconstruct fairy-tale creatures to give a reason behind their existence. So the Earth Trolls, for example, have been angered by the excavations and movements of humans, prompting them to rise out of the ground. The Hobbes, meanwhile, *Fable*'s equivalent of goblins, were children who had been kidnapped and cursed before ▶

» The character designs from *Project Ego* would carry over to the final game.

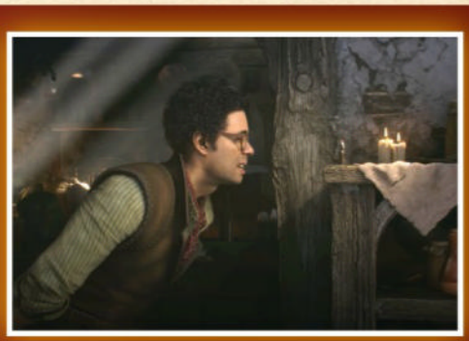
> "I DON'T THINK ANYBODY IN THE TEAM REALLY UNDERSTOOD THE DEPTH TO HOW MUCH AMERICANS LOVE MONTY PYTHON"
> JOHN MCCORMACK

FABLE ANNIVERSARY

■ Lionhead remastered *Fable: The Lost Chapters* in 2014 using Unreal Engine 3, overhauling the graphics and audio, and adding things like achievements and an improved save system. But reviews criticised how the overhaul didn't go far enough to address some problems with the original.

FABLE LEGENDS

■ *Fable Legends* was an online multiplayer RPG that was announced in 2013 and was nearing completion when Microsoft decided to cancel the game and close Lionhead in 2016. Two years later, Mediatonic released the short-lived free-to-play collectible card game *Fable Fortune* on PC and Xbox One.



FABLE

■ A reboot of *Fable* is currently being worked on by Playground Games, developers of the *Forza Horizon* series. The first trailer, starring Richard Ayoade as a giant, was revealed in June 2023, and the game has been in development since around 2018, although it currently doesn't have a release date.

PROJECT MOAT

PETER MOLYNEUX DISCUSSES HIS NEW GAME SET IN ALBION

"It's not going to be a *Fable 4*, or *5*, or whatever," says Peter about the game *Project MOAT* being developed by his studio 22Cans. "But this notion of creating a game within the world of Albion, I think is a really fascinating one. Albion has stayed with me in my mind.

"The original *Fable* had some fantastic simulations in it," he continues, citing the rumour system that would prompt residents to talk about your past deeds when you strolled into town. "So we're using a lot of simulation stuff." He adds that *Project MOAT* will feature some "pretty unique mechanics", although the team is currently "still prototyping and experimenting and exploring". Peter might have learnt from previous mistakes when making bold claims about unfinished games (see the Promises, Promises panel), but he says he misses the days of openly sharing the process of game exploration, which has prompted him to set up a blog to chart *MOAT*'s development, which you can find at developmolyneux.blog

"I've got to be careful of not overpromising, I've got to be careful of not getting people too excited – but it does look fucking amazing," he enthuses. "If I were to show you a demo of *MOAT*, you would be fucking blown away."

» [PC] When he looks back on *Fable*, John says he doesn't think of the punishing development schedule, although he adds that, "I would have different thoughts about the crunch if it flopped and we'd made a stinker."

» [PC] Microsoft bought Lionhead in 2005. Peter says the sale was partly down to the spiralling cost of development, particularly with the switch to next-generation consoles. "If you had a digital counter of how much it cost per second to run the studio, it was going up terrifyingly fast."

» [PC] Weapons can be given augmentations, such as this flame augmentation.

» [PC] John McCormack says the design of *Fable*'s buildings were supposed to reflect trees, with stout bases.

being left in a cave, which resembled "a really messed up daycare centre" says John. For such a funny game, *Fable* went to some very dark places.

From the very beginning, the goal was to make a "particularly British, dark, humorous fantasy game" says John, although they initially imagined it would have a niche audience. So Big Blue Box was surprised at just how much Microsoft bought into the concept, particularly the humour. "I don't think anybody in the team really understood the depth to how much Americans love *Monty Python*," he surmises. Indeed, Peter cites *Monty Python And The Holy Grail* as a particular influence on *Fable*, although he says a lot of the humour in the game simply arose from the freedom given to the player to do "ridiculous things", as well as the "slightly silly, over-the-top characters", rather than specific jokes. *Fable*'s irreverent nature was a deliberate counterpoint to other games in the genre, says John, "We would look at all the American RPGs and the JRPGs at the time and just go, 'Right, if they're doing it, we're not.'"

Fable was such an ambitious project that by the end there were around 150 people working on the game. "I don't know whether Peter was too happy about it in terms of it being suddenly the focus of Lionhead, because it obviously meant that his projects that he was focussing on went on the back burner, and *Fable* took

» [Xbox] Like similar games, *Fable* offers you to chance to take a break from fighting monsters and go fishing.

» [PC] Early on, you discover this cheating husband who offers to pay you to keep quiet – or you can choose to let his wife know of his misdeeds. Or you can take his money and let his wife know anyway.

over everything, essentially," says John. Intrepid's *BC* game was cancelled, and one by one the satellite studios were absorbed back into Lionhead. "Pretty much everybody ended up on *Fable*," John says.

At first the coders at Big Blue Box were relocated to Lionhead's main office, and then eventually the entire satellite studio was shut down as everyone was moved to Guildford. "I missed the Godalming office," says John. "It was the perfect place to come up with *Fable*, because it was surrounded by fields, there was a creepy graveyard on the corner, we were right on a small river with a bridge, and barges would go by. It was really idyllic and picturesque, and the buildings were all Tudor on that main street. So we were just like, 'This is where you make *Fable*.' Whereas the centre of Guildford on a research park is not where you'd make *Fable*. It was very different, there was concrete everywhere and it was an industrial estate. You're just going, 'Yeah, I'm glad we never started it here, because it wouldn't have turned out the same.'"

Peter says there was no game design document for *Fable*, reflecting the studio's commitment to free-form exploration. But this dedication to foregrounding creativity and experimentation came at a cost. "Ultimately, at the end of the day, that meant the development time was quite long and protracted," he says. "There was lots of stuff thrown away, there was lots of stuff added at the last moment, and there were an awful lot of things which had to be done at an extraordinary cost of human endeavour." Peter reckons the crunch period for *Fable* lasted for around 18 months, with some members of the team working six or even seven days a week. "We were all kind of semi-destroyed at the end of it," he says.

» [PC] The enemies are initially outsized wasps and beetles, but soon you start facing much bigger foes.

» [PC] The Balverine is one of the more formidable foes in *Fable*. This werewolf creature is fast and attacks viciously.

> "IT WASN'T ABOUT TRAVELLING TO MORDOR, IT WAS ABOUT STAYING NEAR THE SHIRE"
> JOHN MCCORMACK

» [PC] John looks back on *Fable* with fondness. "Some of the most fun I've ever had was coming up with the stuff in that game," he says.

John says the crunch on *Fable* was "mostly self-imposed in terms of just love for what we were creating", but he adds that it was punishing. "It was a tough old time, and the issue around crunch was really that I was fine with it, except it would extend again. You know, the release date has been pushed six months, let's pluck up the energy and go again. And then it would shift another six months and we would go again." Peter says that one person made a serious suggestion that they should put a double bed into one of the meeting rooms, so that team members could have conjugal visits from their partners.

"For me personally, crunch was just a way of life," says Peter. "Ever since my first game, I've been crunching on every game, it just felt like this was a natural thing." He adds that when humans focus intently on something, whether it's a videogame or a new invention, "That creative focus does result in some astounding achievements. I think *Fable* definitely was one of those."

***Fable* was released on Xbox in September 2004, and although the reviews were generally glowing, one of the main criticisms was about the game's length.** "I can clearly remember people saying, 'I started playing *Fable* on Friday and I finished it on Sunday,'" says Peter. John thinks that people's expectation of how long RPGs should be had been set by games like *Final Fantasy*, but *Fable* was less about an epic narrative and more about encouraging experimentation. "We wanted the lengthy part of it to be the sandbox," he says. "It wasn't about travelling to Mordor, it was about staying near The Shire."

The team addressed the criticisms with the release of *Fable: The Lost Chapters* for Xbox and PC in 2005, which added things like new areas, quests, monsters and weapons to the base game. But John thinks that people's fondness for *Fable* doesn't come from specific quests or fights: instead they remember the emergent gameplay, the things they made happen, like coming home drunk and being shouted at by their partner. "We put so much work into that, and thankfully it paid off, because that's what made the game unique," says John. "People made stories for themselves."

GameCube

» **MANUFACTURER:** Nintendo » **YEAR:** 2001
» **COST:** £129.99 (launch), £60+ (today, boxed), £35+ (today, unboxed)

The GameCube doesn't look conventional, with its little carry handle and memorable purple casing. However, compare it to the N64 and it certainly feels that way – the use of optical discs and a fairly standard controller layout indicating that Nintendo was no longer leading the console market. After a couple of generations trying to provide the most powerful console, Nintendo aimed for the GameCube to be the cheapest, a fact underscored by its decision to drop the price of the console weeks before its European launch, in response to an Xbox price cut.

Bolstered by some great games, the GameCube set a new record for UK launch weekend sales with 69,000 consoles snapped up, but fierce competition from Sony and Microsoft meant that that the momentum wouldn't last. Major retailers like the Dixons Group and Argos dropped the console within a year, and while subsequent price cuts and bundles boosted demand and reversed some of the damage, it couldn't match the sales of its rivals. These disappointing results convinced Nintendo to pursue a new home-console strategy with the Wii.

ESSENTIAL GAME

Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem

Many of the best GameCube games have made their way to more modern platforms, but this survival horror game is unlikely to follow them, which is a shame as it's a true classic of the genre. This Lovecraftian tale follows various characters around the world and through time as they have fateful encounters with forces far greater than they could imagine. As well as avoiding injuries, you'll have to keep your characters sane through their ordeals – if you don't, the game's signature Sanity Effects will start messing with you directly.

GameCube fact

■ Two GameCube models exist, DOL-001 and DOL-101. The latter doesn't include the Digital AV Out port that provides progressive scan video, and has updated firmware that blocks some cheat and import discs.

PROCESSOR: 32-BIT IBM GEKKO POWERPC CPU (486 MHZ)

RAM: 24MB 1T-SRAM MAIN MEMORY, 3MB 1T-SRAM GRAPHICS CACHE, 16MB DRAM I/O BUFFER FOR AUDIO AND DVD DRIVE

GRAPHICS: ARTX ATI FLIPPER CUSTOM GPU (162 MHZ), 6-20 MILLION POLYGONS PER SECOND IN GAME CONDITIONS (EFFECTS INCLUDING TEXTURES, LIGHTING, FOGGING, Z-BUFFERING, ALPHA BLENDING)

AUDIO: 16-BIT MACRONIX CUSTOM DSP (81 MHZ), INTEGRATED INTO FLIPPER, 64 CHANNEL ADPCM, 48 KHZ SAMPLING FREQUENCY

MEDIA: 8CM NINTENDO GAMECUBE DISC (1.5GB), GAME BOY, GAME BOY COLOR, GAME BOY ADVANCE ROM CARTRIDGES (UP TO 256 MEGA BIT, VIA OPTIONAL GAME BOY PLAYER)

STORAGE: NINTENDO GAMECUBE MEMORY CARD (UP TO 8MB, OPTIONAL)

THE MAKING OF DAXTER

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
- **DEVELOPER:** READY AT DAWN STUDIOS
- **RELEASED:** 2006
- **PLATFORM:** PSP
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

SIDEKICKS RESCUING THE MAIN CHARACTER OF A SERIES IN STANDALONE GAMES IS FAIRLY COMMON. IN DAXTER'S CASE, IT TOOK HIM TWO YEARS TO FREE HIS FRIEND JAK. VETERANS OF READY AT DAWN STUDIOS EXPLAIN HOW DAXTER'S QUEST BECAME ONE OF THE PSP'S MOST AMBITIOUS PLATFORMERS

WORDS BY GUY MIQUEL-ALBERT

The *Jak And Daxter* series embodies one of the most popular PlayStation 2 IP, telling in an imaginative way through action and platforming, the story of two alien characters. Jak, mute at his beginnings, is a humanoid with pointy ears, while his motormouth friend and sidekick Daxter has become an Ottsel – a fusion of an otter and a weasel – and isn't too happy about it.

Following the videogame industry trend and the success of *Grand Theft Auto III*, Naughty Dog's sequel added open-world features to its level design and featured a much darker, dystopian plot. Daxter was chosen as the main character of the eponymous videogame that takes place in between these first two games. Jak has been made prisoner in Haven City and Daxter promises to set him free. Two years later, Jak is still a prisoner when the Ottsel is given a job in a disinfestation company. The latter's boss could not find anyone up to the task of getting rid of the metal bugs that are running around Haven City.

Considering *Jak X*, the latest instalment in the series, had relatively low sales in 2005 and the progressive general disinterest for cute characters in the videogame industry, it seemed quite bold to release a spin-off in 2006 on Sony's portable console. Michael John, who joined the project as a freelance lead designer, disagrees, telling us, "I was involved in the Universal Interactive days with *Spyro* and *Crash Bandicoot*, years before, and the exact same questions were asked. Why make colourful and playful games when everything is about shooting, about being dark and scary? But there is always a market for things that are joyful, childish to some extent, and appealing way beyond childhood for a lot of people. There are periods in the videogame industry where this genre is less popular among developers, but our choice was wise for the PSP especially. *Daxter* was really well adapted to this hardware."

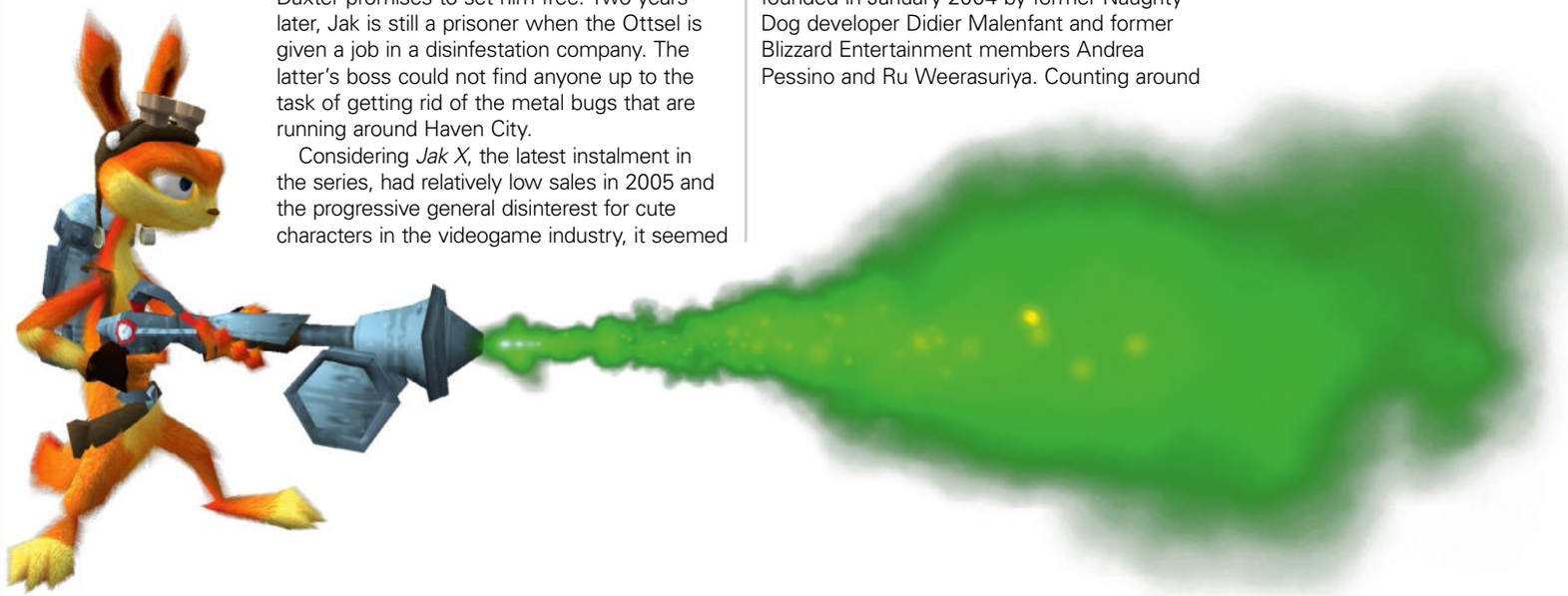
Daxter is the first project of Ready At Dawn Studios, a California-based company founded in January 2004 by former Naughty Dog developer Didier Malenfant and former Blizzard Entertainment members Andrea Pessino and Ru Weerasuriya. Counting around

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

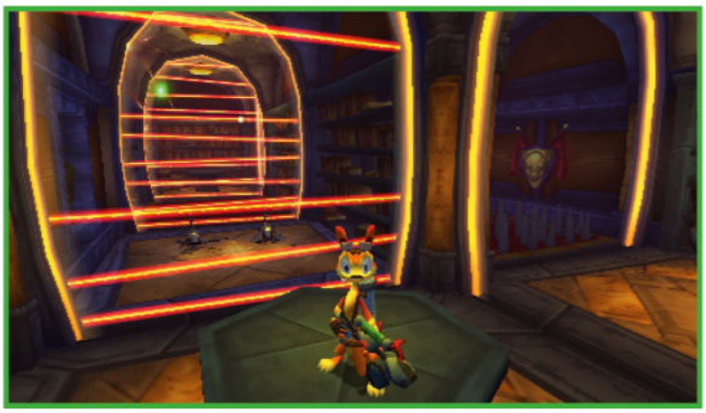
GOD OF WAR: CHAINS OF OLYMPUS (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: PSP, PS3
RELEASED: 2008

GOD OF WAR: GHOST OF SPARTA
PLATFORM: PSP, PS3
RELEASED: 2010

THE ORDER: 1886
PLATFORM: PS4
RELEASED: 2015



20 developers by then, one can only wonder whether a garage mindset was preserved in the process, even though experienced developers worked on *Daxter*. "When I joined the team, there were already two other programmers, not including Didier, a tools programmer and Andrea, who worked on the engine," recalls Rachid El Guerrab, *Daxter*'s lead programmer. "The rest of my teammates were artists. There was a sense of working on something to really push quality. The PlayStation Portable came after the Game Boys, and was presented as a device that could offer games as big as home-console games. It was a very specialised high-quality team working on a portable game, counting very disciplined experienced veterans, who knew what they were doing." Michael agrees with Rachid's assessment adding, "Ready At Dawn 1.0 gathered very experienced people but as a startup, there was necessarily a garage vibe, we were frankly on the brink. If something couldn't get fixed, for example, the whole project wouldn't survive, nor the studio. It was scrappy. The team identified with Daxter's personality, in a way, Daxter being always portrayed as an underdog. And it worked!" Also, according to Rachid, the team crunched a lot. "There was a late-night shift and an early morning shift. After my child was born I was part of the early morning shift and we were always joking, meeting the late-night shift at 4am, about Ready At Dawn being the company that never sleeps."



» [PSP] Some areas require some real thinking and timing to get through.

» [PSP] Bosses get more and more impressive and evolve throughout the game.

RACHID EL GUERRAB

■ Rachid worked on *Daxter* as lead programmer. He created his own startup, Haiba Labs, in the interactive storytelling field.

MICHAEL JOHN

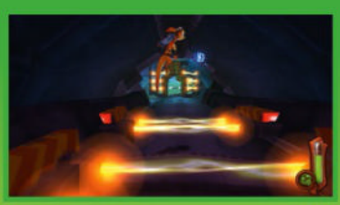
■ Michael was lead designer on *Daxter*. He is now professor at UC Santa Cruz, teaching varied subjects, including game design.

DEXTROUS DAXTER

THIS OTTSEL HAS A VERY PARTICULAR SET OF SKILLS...

■ **BUG SWATTER ATTACK:** Combos performed with the electric bug swatter earned at the beginning of the game are extremely efficient against metal bugs.

■ **SPRAY GUN ATTACK:** Daxter can fire a Green Eco spray, flames and even ultrasonic waves with his spray gun, depending on the chosen attachment.



■ **HIGH JUMPING:** This skill is useful when Daxter wants to move from one platform to another, to grab a ledge or avoid an incoming obstacle.

■ **PIPE/ROPE SLIDING:** After a jump, Daxter can grab a pipe to slide downwards and quickly reach a lower area, collecting precious Precursor Orbs on the way.

■ **CRAWLING:** This is handy for when Daxter needs to go through a small vent, inside a pipe or become inconspicuous in areas that require some stealth.

■ **CLIMBING:** Some areas, like grids, can be climbed by the mouthy Ottsel. Once attached, Daxter can move around freely in all directions.

■ **PILOTING ZOOMERS:** Some missions require control of vehicles to hunt bigger metal bugs, destroy a few targets or collect items in a limited amount of time.

■ **HOVERING:** Targeting the floor with his spray gun allows Daxter to hover short distances, depending on how much Green Eco he can collect.

» [PSP] Some missions take place outside Haven City. Riding a Zoomer can be quite relaxing.

» [PSP] Camera controls sometimes make hitting metal bugs with the electric swatter rather complicated.

» [PSP] Chain attacks always end up putting Daxter through very acrobatic positions.

Daxter's gameplay relies on classic platformer mechanics but also on the use of a close combat electric bug swatter and a spray gun that can be upgraded with additional fluids. "A lot of this was well underway by the time I joined the project," Michael remembers, "and it just wasn't right yet. The swatter uses a combo mechanic that wasn't already implemented, there was just a spinning attack. This new combo feature we added is admittedly influenced by the early *God Of War* games. On the other hand, the spray gun game mechanic just needed to be fine-tuned – its range and duration, for instance."

Character control is another essential aspect to consider when developing a platformer, and special care was taken by the team to get things just right. "On the last day of E3, Shigeru Miyamoto was going around to check out teams," Rachid says. "People were preselecting games for him to check out, and we saw a group of people coming to our booth, bringing him in without further notice. He picked up the console. We completely froze at that moment, and the five minutes he played our game felt like an eternity. Watching him controlling Daxter, a character close to the type of work he does, games where controls are essential, was a proud moment, because I worked on those controls. It was the first big character I worked on the actual controls, trying to make them feel as smooth and fluid as the work that was made on the *Jak And Daxter* series."

Michael's previous works include *Spyro The Dragon*, which had a lot of influence on *Daxter*'s development. "The bulk of the work that I did for *Spyro* was level design, because there was so much level design to be done, and that ended up being a lot of the work I did on *Daxter* as well. Outside of *Super Mario 64*, there wasn't any reference point when I worked on *Spyro*, so I was discovering many principles then." Fortunately, work on *Daxter* wasn't as challenging. "These ideas had matured when I started working on *Daxter*: how to create elements to surprise the player, how to arouse his or her curiosity or generate some interest, excitement and mystery," says Michael. "The level design evolution matured a lot from the first *Spyro* game to the third one, according to me, and became much more interesting. Looking at what happened then could be brought forward to *Daxter*, with the way the levels were structured, the creation of alternate paths and of things only opening up when you follow a specific route. Also, Daxter hovers, and it's not unlike Spyro's glide."

Daxter visits many varied environments on his quest, such as a hotel, a distillery, a valley, a fish cannery, all of which are reachable through a main, small open-world-like hub set in Haven City. These environments are undoubtedly among the most graphically impressive games the PSP can offer, especially only two years into the console's release. Ready At Dawn's first game was really showcasing the power of the PSP's hardware in terms of technical achievements, which impressed a lot of people. "Many people came to our E3 booth to enjoy *Daxter*," Rachid says. "When the game launches and displays the menu on the screen, Daxter moves around the menu, showing real-time fur. It was a lot of work to perform this really well, and someone at E3 could not believe it, insisting on telling me it was a video. Even after telling him I was sure because I worked on the game, he wouldn't admit it. That proved to us we achieved some great work. *Daxter* became an example and received many awards for design, sound, and graphics."

SIDEKICK SHENANIGANS

FROM VIDEOGAME SIDEKICK TO MAIN STAR

ALUCARD

■ When Trevor Belmont defeats Alucard in *Castlevania III : Dracula's Curse*, the half-human, half-vampire son of Dracula becomes an essential sidekick, helping the vampire hunter in his heroic quest. As the main character of *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*, Alucard uses his unique skills to face his father once more.

YOSHI

■ Nintendo's iconic dinosaur became the main playable character of *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island*, after having acted as Mario's mount in *Super Mario World*. Yoshi would go on to star in many other games, including the underrated *Yoshi's Story*, *Yoshi's Safari* and *Yoshi Touch & Go*

TAILS

■ After assisting Sonic in several games, Miles 'Tails' Prower starred in his own action game released in 1995 for the Game Gear called *Tails Adventure*. Travelling through 2D levels to unlock useful items, the plucky little fox faces the evil Battle Kukku Empire that wants to steal Cocoa Island's precious Chaos Emeralds.

» [PSP] Surrounded by literature, this metal spider seems to be more of a bookworm.

» [PSP] Hanging on moving crates to reach new platforms or collect Precursor Orbs is all part of an Ottsel's job.

These successes weren't coming without a few challenges, with the team having to overcome various problems. According to Michael, "There were very slow and inconsistent loads from the UMD, so every time you had to stream content, which was necessary considering PSP's low memory, things got really dicey. The development kit didn't have that problem because it came with a hard drive." The PlayStation Portable was also new hardware and the game engine had to be made from scratch. Rachid confirms that, "On top of this, the team didn't want to develop the game the way Sony recommended it, because we knew it wouldn't be enough to fulfil our expectations. Also, the first six months we worked on emulators and tried things out, we didn't even have the console. There were no existing methods on how to create certain things. Besides, the cinematics had to be rendered from the engine, in a traditional Naughty Dog way, meaning that we had to implement many technical elements in the graphic engine to achieve this."

Daxter's game design also requires a few QTE skills from time to time, typically during *Daxter*'s Dream Mode feature, an original idea that can be attributed to Jérôme de Menou, Ready At Dawn's in-game animator, according to Michael. Collecting enough Precursor Orbs unlocks dreams the Ottsel can have while sleeping on his bed, reproducing famous scenes from Hollywood blockbusters starring himself, such as *The Matrix*, *The Lord Of The Rings* and *Braveheart*. It's a nice addition that adds additional charm to an already charming game.

According to VGChartz, *Daxter* went on to ship 2.3 million units worldwide and received good to excellent reviews, with scores ranging from 7 in *Edge* and *games*™ to 8.6 in *Game Informer* and 9 in Gamesradar+. Despite a few flaws, such as sometimes inconvenient camera controls, due to the PSP's lack of a second stick, *Daxter* managed to seduce many players thanks to ambitious technical achievements and its very enjoyable gameplay. "*Daxter* was the first game that I was really very proud of," says Rachid, "and it showed me how to behave later on in life. It showed me that by targeting high quality and setting the challenge level very high you could achieve very good things. Also, at the time, gaining respect from other developers was the most important."

» [PSP] The hovering distance and height are independent from the type of spray gun attachment.

» [PSP] Some surfaces propel Daxter extremely high, letting him reach new areas, or hit the ground with considerable pain.

CLANK

■ In order to clear Ratchet's good name in a theft case, Clank investigates in this *James Bond 007* parody action platformer for Sony's PSP. The gameplay of *Secret Agent Clank* is based on close combat, while a few stealth sequences punctuate the level design, rewarding the player's patience.

DIDDY KONG

■ Helped by his friend Dixie, Diddy Kong goes on a journey to save Donkey Kong in this 1995 platformer released for the Super Nintendo. The plucky primate would also go on to star in the popular kart racer *Diddy Kong Racing*, which debuted on the Nintendo 64.

RICHARD JACQUES

Over a career spanning 30 years, Richard Jacques has composed music for some of gaming's most recognisable franchises. Recently, Richard spoke with us about his early work at Sega, the industry today and what might come next

Words by James Tocchio

Richard Jacques is a composer of film, television and videogame soundtracks whose career in the games industry began when he was recruited by Sega Europe while still at university. Within days of graduating, he became the company's in-house composer, and months later he was making music for Sega's flagship franchise, *Sonic The Hedgehog*. In 1997 he created one of the series' most enduring soundtracks with his work on *Sonic R*.

In addition to being the first composer to record a videogame soundtrack at the famed Abbey Road Studios, Richard has worked on such musically exceptional games as *Jet Set Radio, Metropolis Street Racer, Mass Effect, LittleBigPlanet* and *Marvel's Guardians Of The Galaxy*.

» A young Richard Jacques proudly posing next to the Sega sign in 1995

When did you know that you wanted to make music for games, and what was it like to jump in at such a young age?
I had a Sinclair ZX Spectrum computer at age 11, and I started making music on it. I was learning basic programming, making the joystick play different arpeggios on the 8 axes and, at the same time, I was gaming. I used to get up at 5 o'clock in the morning and do an hour before my parents were up, and that's where my love for gaming came from. And then it was the arcade. When *Out Run* came out, I was 13, and I distinctly remember the music, because the quality was a massive jump. *Out Run* had a sophisticated sound chip and the compositions by Hiro [Hiroshi Kawaguchi] were great. That was the first time I thought, "Wow, game music is really cool."

What happened next?
I went to university, and in those days we were given a small grant to help with buying food and stuff, and the first week I went and bought a Mega Drive. I was playing trombone, piano, percussion and I was studying composition and music technology as well. I was also working in a record store and reading this industry trade paper called *Music Week*, and in my final year I saw an advert for an in-house composer with Sega Europe in London.

I never thought that this job existed outside of Japan, because in those days the majority of software was coming out of Japan, and it was all cartridge-based. I was amazed that a job like this could exist, so I thought, well, I am still studying, but I am going to apply.

What did you do?
I sent my résumé and a demo cassette. Something for a driving game, something for a fighting game, an RPG, a platformer, based around Sega's core IPs really, and some electronic music I'd been working on. This was April 1994, they called me back and wanted to hear some more music, so I sent more. One was a large composition for a brass ensemble, 24 players, and it was recorded live in the concert hall at my college. Three days later I got a call that I'd got the job. I was over the moon. I remember jumping up and down on the sofa. But literally, we had my final exam results on a Friday. Saturday I moved to London. Monday I started at Sega.

Do you still have that first recording that you sent Sega?
[Laughing] Yes, I do. And no you can't hear them. [Richard leaves the room and comes back with a cassette tape. The spine shows hand-written letters.]

Oh, wow! It really says 'Sega Demos'.
[Laughing] Yeah, eight tracks. No one's ever gonna hear it.

You said at age 13, *Out Run* was the first time game music really sparked something for you.
Definitely.

We're jumping ahead, but in 2005 or so, you did the remixes for *OutRun 2*! That's an amazing circle!
I knew that Sumo Digital were developing it, and I forget whose idea it was, possibly the producer at Sega Europe, Kats Sato, they came up with this idea of having 'Euro' remixes, but they're not Euro-style, they're more Brazilian samba and salsa. I think they just wanted to give it a badge of its own, that these were created by Sega Europe. But when they said I could remix them, I thought, this is just amazing. *Out Run*'s music is timeless, and credit to Hiro, the original composer. He

> I was amazed that a job like this could exist, so I thought, well, I am still studying, but I am going to apply
>
> Richard Jacques

SELECTED TIMELINE

- **DAYTONA USA: CHAMPIONSHIP CIRCUIT EDITION** [1996] SATURN
- **SONIC 3D BLAST** [1996] SATURN
- **SONIC R** [1997] SATURN
- **JET SET RADIO** [2000] DREAMCAST
- **METROPOLIS STREET RACER** [2000] DREAMCAST
- **HEADHUNTER** [2001] DREAMCAST
- **JET SET RADIO FUTURE** [2002] XBOX
- **PURSUIT FORCE** [2005] PSP
- **STARSHIP TROOPERS** [2005 WINDOWS
- **OUTRUN 2006: COAST 2 COAST** [2006] PLAYSTATION 2, PSP, WINDOWS
- **MASS EFFECT** [2007] XBOX 360
- **007: BLOOD STONE** [2010] XBOX 360, NINTENDO DS, WINDOWS
- **SONIC: FREE RIDERS** [2010] XBOX 360
- **FORZA MOTORSPORT 4** [2011] XBOX 360
- **SONIC: GENERATIONS** [2011] PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360, NINTENDO DS, WINDOWS
- **LITTLEBIGPLANET PS VITA** [2012] PS VITA
- **SONIC & ALL-STARS RACING: TRANSFORMED** [2012] PLAYSTATION 3, NINTENDO DS, WINDOWS, IPAD
- **SONIC BOOM: SHATTERED CRYSTAL** [2014] NINTENDO 3DS
- **SONIC BOOM: FIRE & ICE** [2016] NINTENDO 3DS
- **MARVEL'S GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY** [2021] VARIOUS

» Here's Richard, early on in his career at Sega in 1996.

» Richard taking a call while working at Abbey Road Studios in 2001.

» [Saturn] *Sonic R* has some truly catchy tunes that perfectly capture the on-screen fun.

knocked it out of the park. Those are brilliant tunes. *Passing Breeze* is my favourite.

Let's talk about your early work at Sega. Almost immediately you created one of the most memorable soundtracks in the *Sonic The Hedgehog* series, with *Sonic R*.
I was in Tokyo having meetings with Yuji Naka and Sonic Team. It was Naka-san's idea to use female vocals, and at that time, 1995 or 1996, J-pop was massive, so I went to record stores in Shibuya in Tokyo and bought CDs.

Were there any particular inspirations?
One of the big artists in those days was Namie Amuro. Her music was fantastic, and Naka-san gave me that as a reference. There was also a German singer, Jasmin Wagner, who went by the name Blümchen. Very fast music, almost happy house, over 200 beats a minute, and I think Naka wanted to use her but her record label wouldn't allow it. I wrote *Super Sonic Racing* and recorded that with TJ Davis, and Naka and Sonic Team said, "We love it. We want all the songs to have vocals."

Sonic R's soundtrack is certainly memorable and is discussed often.

» [Dreamcast] *Headhunter* was the first videogame soundtrack to be recorded at the famous Abbey Road recording studio.

It's one of those projects that I think the fans either love or hate. I've made peace with it, but I think because it was only one project out of three-hundred or so that I've done, it was a bit frustrating early in my career when people thought that's the only thing I did. But I was recently giving a keynote speech at a development conference, and I put together a video of cover versions of *Can You Feel The Sunshine?* and I found over 500. And I just felt very humble that people still like it, that they take time to do remixes in all sorts of genres. So I look back on it more comfortably now, and look back with good memories.

Let's talk about one of our favourite soundtracks – *Metropolis Street Racer*.
I had to do literally everything you hear in that game.

That's amazing, because that soundtrack has so many types of musical styles, voice-acted DJs and radio station adverts.
Yeah, I wrote all the DJ scripts, and I wanted to make each radio station feel like it was aimed at a certain demographic, and I had to do all the car engine sounds, all the sound effects. A lot of work. There's 27 in-game songs plus some front-end music. We had TJ Davis again, and a few other singers, but for a while people weren't sure that it was TJ singing because she had to go under the name Helena Davison, due to a record deal. But it was great to have TJ, she's incredibly versatile. Some of those vocal styles are very different, going from R&B to rock to dance, and she just bloody nailed it.

MSR is the only game, I may be wrong, but I haven't heard anything since that has real brand advertisements. Games like *GTA*, they have made up brands, and they're all really funny, but we had real-life radio ads. We had our marketing department approach some big brands, and we said, "Have you got any 30-second radio ads

» *Metropolis Street Racer* saw Richard involved in every aspect of the game, from its soundtrack, to each car's engine sounds.

> "When Jet Set Radio was sent over, everyone in the office was like, 'Oh, my God!' And we listened to the music thinking, 'Who the hell has done this!?'"
> Richard Jacques

that you could let us use in the game." I thought that made it even more realistic.

Have you been surprised that people are still enjoying your music after so many years?
I never foresaw YouTube coming along. I think that's what's given it longevity. Something like *Sonic R*, *Jet Set Radio* and probably *MSR*, they have a completely new generation of fans. I was doing some stats the other day, and YouTube views alone, my *Sonic R* songs top 25 million views, which blows me away.

There are people thinking about games not as disposable entertainment, but as things to be analysed and appreciated. They're discovering games with fresh eyes and ears, saying, "Woah! *Ridge Racer Type 4*! Games have such great music!"
I think the videogame music of the Nineties has a very charming quality and compositional style, which does herald from Japanese arcades, influenced by jazz and jazz funk. I can say, "Oh, that sounds like a piano solo from Shakatak." An Eighties jazz funk band. The younger generation in their teens or twenties will hear and think, "What's this?" And then they'll go and find out about it.

Okay, you finished your work on *Metropolis Street Racer*, what happened next?
I went straight to *Headhunter*. The cool thing about that project was that *Headhunter* was the first ever videogame to be recorded at Abbey Road Studios. We recorded on 27 January 2001. It was nice to be the first to do that. Hopefully it helped other composers and videogame companies to know that you can do this. This is the norm. The director of the game, John Kroknes, wanted a Hollywood soundtrack, and I was like, absolutely, it fits with this kind of game and the story and the characters.

It seems that Sega often sent you off to help other studios.
Yes, I was based at Sega Europe headquarters, but I was working with other studios and with Sega Japan when their composers were busy, or if they wanted another take on a track. *Jet Set Radio* is a good example of that. When that game was sent over, everyone in the office was like, "Oh, my God!" And we listened to the music thinking, "Who the hell has done this?!" It was [Hideki] Naganuma-san, of course, credit goes to him for the overall style of the game. He just said, "Do you want to do a track?" And I was honoured to create one for that game. For the sequel, *Jet Set Radio Future*, there's a track I wrote called *What About The Future* which is much more electronic. I went a bit harder on that one, because it was more futuristic, and it was a harder game as well.

And was it soon after that you decided to go independent? How did that happen?
Sega were making some changes, from hardware manufacturer to software developer. Having spent eight really good, happy years there, I thought *Headhunter* was a good launchpad in terms of orchestral soundtracks.

MUSIC TO OUR EARS

Some of the top picks from Richard's 30-year career

F1 CHALLENGE

■ Richard's very first credit at Sega was for this Formula 1 racer for Sega's Saturn. The game's soundtrack has a distinctly Japanese arcade sensibility, up-tempo drums punctuating a synth guitar reminiscent of musical styles that would gain popularity in later Sega games.

SONIC R

■ *Super Sonic Racing* was the very first song written for the *Sonic R* soundtrack. The optimistic lyrics and upbeat sounds of *Super Sonic Racing* and *Can You Feel The Sunshine?* have given these songs iconic status in the *Sonic The Hedgehog* series.

PURSUIT FORCE

■ The Sony PSP action game, *Pursuit Force*, features a sweeping orchestral score which beautifully accentuates the gameplay. The *Pursuit Force* series can now be played on PS4 and PS5 through Sony's online Classics Catalogue.

SONIC & ALL-STARS RACING TRANSFORMED

■ This amazing soundtrack contains a couple of original tracks, as well as reimagined versions of Sega's most iconic songs from games like *Panzer Dragoon*, *Jet Set Radio*, *Sonic*, *The House Of The Dead* and many more.

MARVEL'S GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY

■ Richard's recent work includes the soundtrack for this adventure. For this game, Richard worked very hard to create a soundtrack that would accentuate the narrative and gameplay. It's among the most reactive and tonally appropriate soundtracks ever composed.

GETTING INTO GAMES MUSIC

Richard has advice for the next generation

We asked Richard what sort of advice he'd give to someone seeking to enter the games music industry today. Here are the useful tips he offered.

1 It's important to have your own musical voice. If you're just gonna be another composer that sounds like Mr A, or Mr B Hollywood composer, Mr A and Mr B are already doing that. What fresh ideas do you bring?

2 If people don't know who you are, they can't hire you. Go to game jams, go to networking events, go to conferences, go to game launches.

3 Be a problem solver. Learn how to do some basic sound design and voice-over editing. Look at the indie sector to try and get a foot in the door, find out what projects are happening. Even look for projects from people who are still in university. These days, you won't walk into Sony and score a PS5 game.

4 It's good to look for an established composer who is looking for assistance. For example, I have an assistant, and then towards the end of a big project I put a team together of about ten people for the last three to six months.

5 Be a nice person, don't hassle people too much. It's fine to connect with people and remind them who you are every six months, but if you email them every week that's not really gonna work.

6 Learn to take rejection. Sometimes you'll pitch a demo for a gig that we don't always get. If you're not working on a game now, try and rescore some games footage, and as long as you credit the developer, the publisher, and the original composer and make it clear that it's a rescored demo, that's a good way to practice.

7 You might have to have another source of income when you're starting out, but that could be music related. You could teach, do orchestration, music preparation. Look at those kinds of things to earn money.

8 But you've got to be a specialist and most of the good courses would teach much of this in the USA, Europe and Australia.

» Richard in the studio while working on the audio for the excellent *OutRun 2*

> "What I'm trying to achieve as a composer is to create that emotional backdrop without getting in the way of the narrative or experience"
> Richard Jacques

So I made the leap, but have remained in very good connection with Sega ever since, which has been great.

Sega has announced that it's developing a new *Jet Set Radio*. We're wondering if you have any thoughts on that project?
If they're listening, I would be very happy to contribute some tracks.

We're sure the fans would like that.
I assume Naganuma-san's probably doing some stuff on it, and they'll probably have some licensed tracks. But yeah, I would love to contribute.

Do you have a favourite project or a favourite composition from your career?
It's a really close call between *Guardians Of The Galaxy* and *James Bond 007: Blood Stone*, which was an amazing opportunity to write a high-octane *James Bond* soundtrack. I loved working on that. If there's one piece of music, it's from *Mass Effect*. There's a cutscene, about two minutes long, where the Normandy is flying through space, and you see the Citadel for the first time in the clouds and the clouds open, and it's this huge reveal. I had such fun scoring that scene, and the fans really love it, so that's a highlight for me.

Who are your favourite musicians working in games?
I don't know how much writing he's doing now, but I got to know Tim Follin when he was working on the Dreamcast game *Ecco The Dolphin: Defender Of The Future*. That soundtrack is one of my favourites. Tim's a great musician and a really nice guy. We both have similar tastes in harmonies and the way we construct melody. I'd also mention Yuzo Koshiro as an outstanding composer. And I love the music of Inon Zur and Jesper Kyd. Inon is a great symphonic writer; his score to *Starfield* is amazing. And Jesper always does great work, especially *Assassin's Creed 2*.

What sort of games are you enjoying these days, outside of work?
I used to be into driving and fighting games. I would play *Virtua Fighter 2* and *Tekken*, all the Sega driving games. Now, because I'm a bit older and maybe wiser, I like strategy and sims. *Age Of Empires*, *Civilization*, *Cities: Skylines*. But what I really love are narrative-driven single-player games.

We've been especially drawn to those in the last five or ten years, too. We want a story, something with emotion. Music plays a huge role in that.
If you're playing a 40-hour game, you might play it again and again, that's a lot of time listening to this music. It forms a backdrop in our heads, both the emotions that the game is giving us and the emotions we feel as players. What I'm trying to achieve as a composer is to create that emotional backdrop without getting in the way of the narrative or experience.

Your work in *Guardians Of The Galaxy* is a great example of that. We were stunned by the score's reactivity and tonal balance.
I wanted to make that game as good as I could, and a Marvel experience, which is narrative driven, with an ensemble cast, with humour and poignant moments, I was keen that we had to nail it. There's a scene with Gamora which is only about four minutes long, but it used 26 individual segments of music. I enjoy the challenge of giving the player an emotionally correct score, and I think story has matured so much in the videogame industry in the last ten years with depth of character and emotion, and I'm really happy both as a

» Another 1996 shot, this time it's of the recording studio that Richard would use.

» Richard is a big fan of the *Jet Set Radio* series and would love to work on the incoming sequel.

gamer and for the opportunities it presents as a composer.

Let's talk about virtual reality and music. To give a launching point, we're thinking of Tetsuya Mizuguchi's studio's musically driven VR experiences like *Tetris Effect* and *Rez Infinite*.

I was a huge *Sega Rally* fan and I remember the first time I met Mizuguchi-san, he was a god to me. We got to know each other around when they released the first *Rez* on Dreamcast. I was in Tokyo and he said meet me at this really cool club down at the harbour at one in the morning, cause he knows I like that kind of music. And it was really cool to share that experience with him. He's a great guy and an incredible developer and I think the VR version of *Rez* is just perfect. As for music in VR, if we're composing in a Dolby Atmos or a spatialised audio field, you have to think differently. For example, in *OutRun 2* we made stereo mixes, but also Dolby surround mixes, and where normally I would just make things sound bigger and wider, having discrete positioning in the 3D audio field allows crazy stuff on surround mixes. We can be more creative. In terms of musical composition we've reached a point where we can take more creative risk.

» If you love Sega soundtracks you'll enjoy the magical compositions found in *Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed*.

» [Dreamcast] Richard contributed to *Jet Set Radio*'s superb soundtrack (or *Jet Grind Radio* if you lived in the States).

We find indie developers are especially willing to take risks. Games like *Donut County*, or *Sayonara Wild Hearts*, or something even smaller, like *Casual Birder*, all have incredible, unique soundtracks.

The indie scene is so creative. I haven't worked on anything that I would class as indie. I'd love to, because of that risk-taking, but also because the budgets are more limited, and that can give a project a quirky, enchanting sound. Not every game needs an epic score. A good score should have a lot of shape in it as well.

Do you think about your legacy or what you'd like to achieve by the time you wrap up your career?

I like to be challenged creatively and technically, and the big narrative-driven games is what I'm really into. But I also like having fun as well, so I wouldn't say no to another *Jet Set Radio*, for pure enjoyment. I've got no desire to hang up my hat anytime soon. I'm very happy doing what I'm doing, and I'm lucky to be in this position. I feel privileged every day. I've been in the industry for over thirty years now, and I'm absolutely loving it every day. I can't say fairer than that.

» Richard takes a break from composing classic videogame soundtracks to attend the 2022 Grammys.

THE FUTURE OF MUSIC

Richard Jacques on AI in music

■ SAG AFTRA (a labour union representing over 160,000 media professionals) has signed a deal with Replica Studios, an artificial intelligence voice technology company which allows Replica Studios to use AI-generated voices in videogames. Media professionals worry that this will result in voice actors being replaced by AI-generated performers.

We asked Richard for his thoughts on AI-generated content in games. "What computers don't do well, whether it's music, or narrative, or voice, they just aren't very good at emotion," he says. "The AI voice-over work that I've heard just doesn't sound very good, and what a human actor can bring to a performance is second to none. AI-generated music is already happening in EDM, because that stuff is easier for AI to create. If you ask it to compose a symphony or a complicated orchestral score, it's just not there yet. That's not to say it won't be in time. I think if we can use it as a creative tool, that's OK, I just hope we can find a middle path. It will have an impact. I hope it's a positive one."

RECORD
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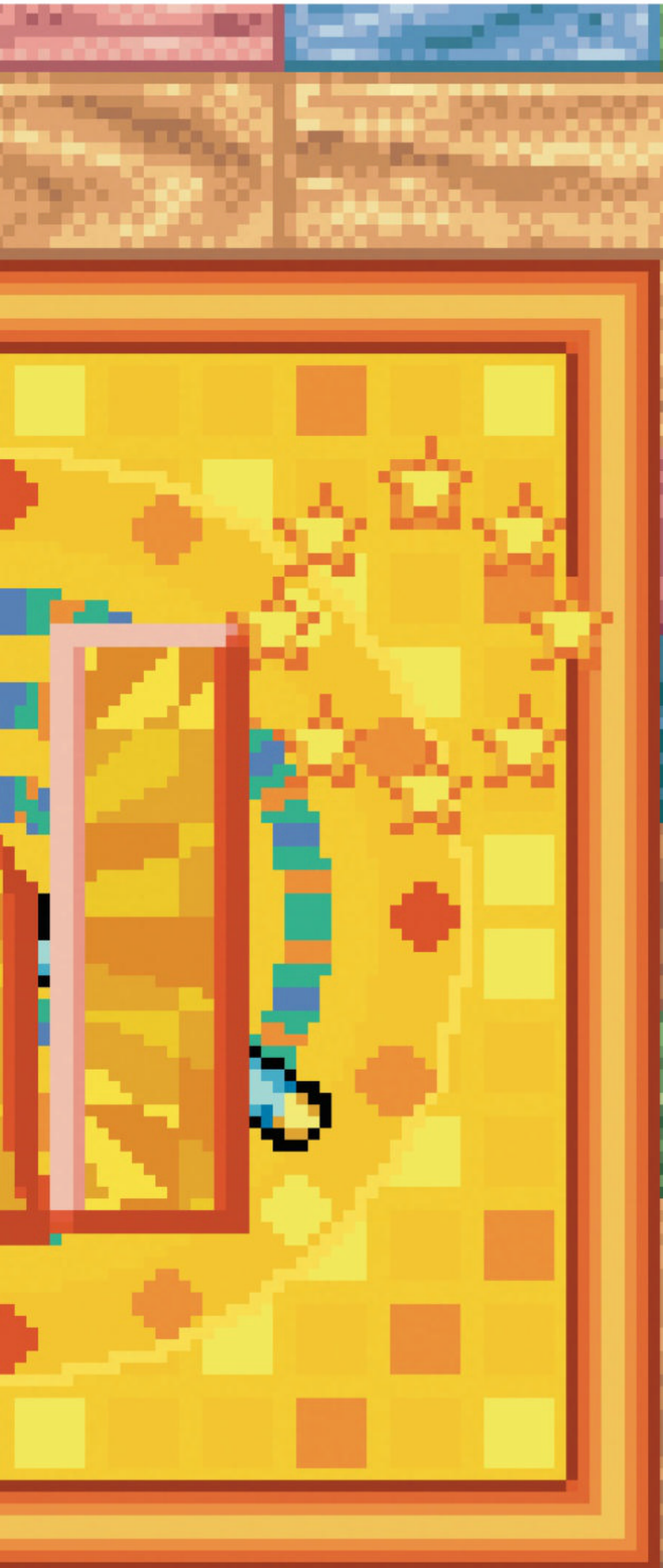


Kuru Kuru Kururin

GAMING FINDS A WAY

» GAME BOY ADVANCE » 2001 » EIGHTING

As challenging as working on a games magazine can be, it can also be a lot of fun. When friends and family first found out about my new career I'd always get asked the same things from them, with the most common being, "Can you get me some free games?", "It must be nice getting to play videogames all day" and "I've a problem with my computer, can you fix it for me?"

The stark reality is that a lot of gaming doesn't get done during work time and there was one period of time at Imagine when you'd actually get chastised if you were reviewing a game during 'work time'. After all, we've got a mag to put together. There's stuff to write, articles to read, people to interview, covers to arrange, flatplans to fill and various other things I won't bore you with.

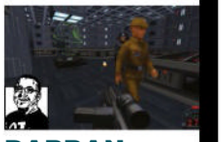
Still, the **Retro Gamer** team often found time to do some gaming or 'research' as we'd often call it. When the team consisted of myself, Stuart Hunt and Steve Williams, we'd often have handheld competitions, partly because their games were often score-based and also because they were easier to hide. While the surfing in *California Games* was an early go-to for challenges, we ended up hammering *Kuru Kuru Kururin*, Raizing's quirky puzzler.

Levels in the game were short and sweet, meaning we could easily put aside a few minutes between writing and designing while we had a quick go. *Kuru Kuru Kururin* requires you to get through a tricky maze as quickly as possible, without knocking the walls with your Helirin's constantly rotating blades. You'll inevitably hit those walls as you try to rack up the fastest times and the rivalry between the three of us got quite fierce as we constantly tried to outdo each other. So the next time you see me crouched over my keyboard with a concentrated look on my face, I'm probably just hard at work, but I might also be doing some research.

RETRORATED

» Will anybody have a name left to take, at the rate that Tekken 8 is kicking asses? It seems rather unlikely, we have to say. Over the page, we've got more reviews including the latest Evercade cartridges and the remake of Mario Vs Donkey Kong

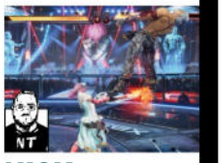
★PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN

Stars Wars: Dark Forces Remaster

It arrived a little too late to review this issue, but Nightdive Studio's update is superb. Make sure you grab a copy.



NICK

Tekken 8

Yoshimitsu has been good to me all these years, and he's been rather mean to some people on the internet.

» [PlayStation 5] *Tekken 8* uses Unreal Engine 5, and achieves spectacular graphical quality with it.

Tekken 8

30 YEARS IN, THE ACTION IS STILL HEATING UP

Retro Gamer Sizzler

INFORMATION

- **FORMAT REVIEWED:** PS5
- **ALSO ON:** XBOX SERIES X/S, PC
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £69.99
- **PUBLISHER:** BANDAI NAMCO
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2

It's easy to look at the fighting game scene and think that it's doing great right now. After all, the last few years have seen *Street Fighter 6*, *Mortal Kombat 1*, *The King Of Fighters XV*, *Guilty Gear Strive* and more. But those are 2D fighters, and the 3D side of things has been bereft of high-profile releases – we haven't seen a new *Soulcalibur* or *Dead Or Alive* in over five years, and *Virtua Fighter 5: Ultimate Showdown* is based on a game that's nearly 20 years old. With that in mind, we're really rather fortunate that *Tekken 8* is as good as it is.

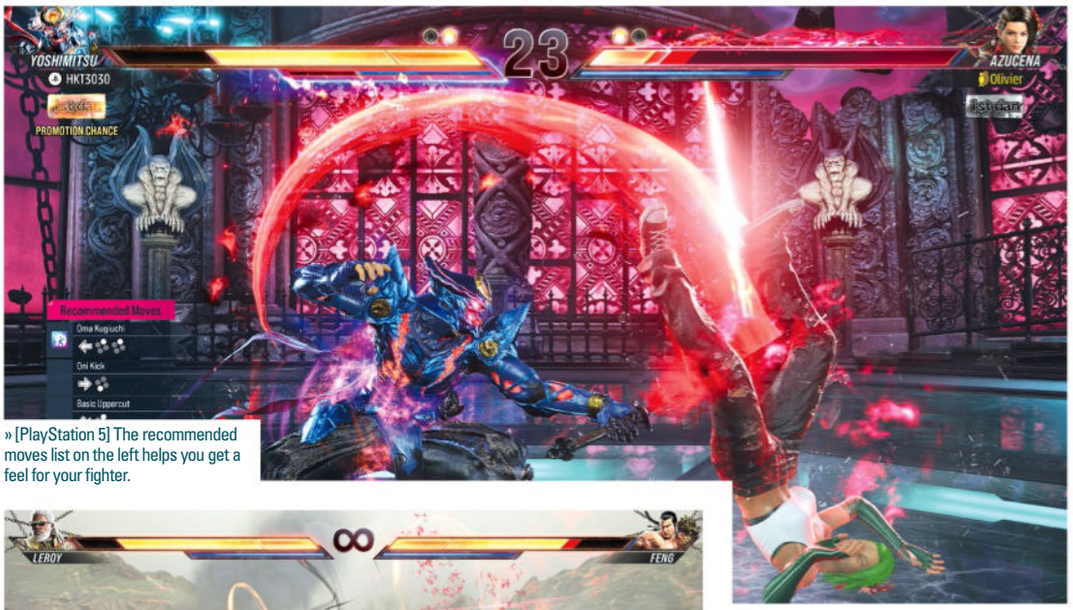
The basics of the fighting system are all as you'd expect – the one-limb-per-button control scheme is intact, the usual air juggles and wall bounds are present and Rage Arts return from *Tekken 7*. The new addition this time around is Heat, a state in which your character deals major chip damage to blocking opponents and gains certain special move properties. At any time before your gauge runs out, you can perform a special Heat Smash move that can do massive damage but will instantly end your Heat state. It's very useful in putting pressure on the opponent, but it has to be used wisely as you can only activate Heat once per round.

For single players, the main meat of the game comes in two story modes. The Dark Awakens is the usual multi-character cinematic affair focussing on Mishima family drama. It's quite over the top and very entertaining for the few hours it lasts, and it gives you the chance to play with plenty of the game's 32-strong cast. Most of the characters are familiar faces, but newcomers

» [PlayStation 5] One of the best *Tekken* minigames is back, and it's even playable online.

BRIEF HISTORY

» *Tekken 8* is the latest entry in Namco's 30-year-old 3D fighting series, and follows the power struggle between Jin Kazama and Kazuya Mishima in the wake of Heihachi's death in *Tekken 7*. Former *Dead Or Alive* series director Yohei Shimbori joined Bandai Namco for this game, and some of the speed and spectacle of that series does seem to have come along with him.



» [PlayStation 5] The recommended moves list on the left helps you get a feel for your fighter.

» [PlayStation 5] Snippets of dialogue during the story battles, further reveal character motivations.

Azucena, Reina and Victor fit right in with the other combatants. There are also short Character Episode stories for every fighter, complete with opening and ending scenes.

Tekken 8's commitment to welcoming new players is best seen in Arcade Quest, a meta-story in which you visit a variety of arcades and aim for the top of the competitive *Tekken* scene. This mode is great for helping you to learn a character, with little tutorials spaced throughout and displays of suggested moves to work into your repertoire. However, if you're having trouble with the traditional techniques, the Special Style controls provide a simplified input method that is standardised across characters. The game also includes graphical options for visually impaired players, which is always good to see.

Beyond that, there are standard Arcade Battle and Practice modes, you can fight against AI ghost versions of *Tekken* developers and your online foes, the Tekken Ball minigame makes a welcome return and there's a gallery full of movies and illustrations to unlock. There are also plenty of customisation options for both characters and your player avatar. We're sad to see that past favourite extra modes like Time Attack, Team Battle and Survival aren't implemented, but honestly that's one of very few complaints we can muster about the game.

If you've not got anyone to enjoy local multiplayer with, you'll be pleased to know that the online multiplayer offers cross-platform play for the first time ever, and thanks to some rock solid rollback netcode we were able to have very smooth matches with both PS5 players and those on other platforms. What's really cool is that the Replay mode helps you learn from your matches, showing you your mistakes and giving tips on how to punish your opponents next time.

Tekken 8 is just great from top to bottom. Every match feels like a spectacle thanks to the mechanical focus on aggression and stages that allow for massive amounts of carnage – none of which causes any frame drops, even with the graphics being absolutely stunning throughout. The music is just as great as in previous *Tekken* games too, with a Jukebox mode available for those so inclined. It's an expensive game and DLC is naturally on the way, but you'd have to have some fairly lofty expectations to feel short-changed by what's on offer as standard here. The King Of The Iron Fist retains its crown then, and provides a great starting point for the inevitable updates to come in the future. ✱

In a nutshell

In a series that rarely puts a foot wrong, *Tekken 8* still manages to stand out as a highlight. It's hard to imagine any 3D fighting game seriously challenging it any time soon.

» Score **92%**

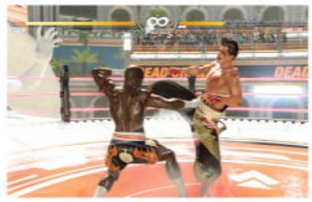
✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

TEKKEN 3

▼ SOMETHING NEW

DEAD OR ALIVE 6



» [PlayStation 5] Arcade Quest has some cool things to say about how to enjoy *Tekken*.

» [PlayStation 5] The conflict between Kazuya and Jin is the focal point of The Dark Awakens.

» [PlayStation 5] Shaheen's ridiculous Rage Art allows him to ride his opponent like a surfboard.

PICK OF THE MONTH

Evercade Multi Game Carts

» **System:** Evercade series **Buy it for:** £17.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

Blaze Entertainment's first Evercade cartridges of 2024 are finally with us so let's dive in with the reviews. Fans of the Commodore 64 will be delighted with some of the titles that have been crammed onto *TheC64 Collection 3*. Hewson is well represented here, with highlights including *Heavy Metal Paradroid*, *Exolon*, *Cybernoid II: The Revenge*, *Cyberdyne Warrior* and *Netherworld*. The puzzler *Anarchy* and adventure *Deliverance: Stormlord II* are also included. There are four Epyx games featured in the 13-strong collection as well. *Jumpman Junior* is a fun single-screen platformer, *Summer Games II* is a polished sports game, *Break Dance* is a dull music game and *Super Cycle* is a brilliant riff on *Hang-On*. That leaves *Street Sports Soccer* and the excellent *Boulder Dash*.

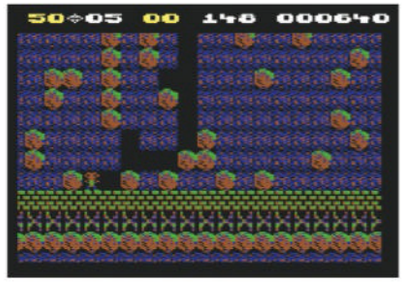
» Score **83%**

The star of Indie *Heroes Collection 3* is easily the slick native port of *Donut Dodo* (although it's currently unplayable on the Super Pocket). The remaining 12 games are a mixed bag and include two updated games from earlier carts (*Alien Cat 2* and *Doodle World Returns*). The platformers *Orebody: Binder's Tale* and *Thunder Paw* and the puzzle games *Chew Chew Mimic* and *Big2Small* are fun highlights. That leaves *Skate Cat*, *Bubble Seahorse Adventures*, *Magic And Legend: Time Knights*, *Bone Marrow*, *The Little Tales Of Alexandria* and *Chibi Monster Br4wl* to investigate.

Aside from *Donut Dodo*, both carts ran fine on the EXP, VS and Super Pocket and the usual emulation quality applies. It is starting to feel like the indie well is beginning to run a little dry, but there's no denying you're getting plenty of gaming for your £18.

» Score **84%**

» [Evercade] *Donut Dodo* is superb fun, even with its long loading times on the Evercade systems.



» [Evercade] *Rockford*'s first adventure remains an excellent little puzzler.

Mario Vs Donkey Kong

» **System:** Switch » **Buy it for:** £39.99
» **Buy it from:** Online, retail

While there's no denying the gorgeous pixel art of the original game, this new update is the version to own. If you've never played *Mario Vs Donkey Kong* before, the aim is to collect presents and clockwork Mario toys across several worlds, before guiding them to the safety of their toy box and defeating Donkey Kong. While the first few worlds are relatively simple, new mechanics are continually introduced that make later stages very tricky. Nintendo has added plenty of additional extras including two brand-new worlds, an entertaining Time Attack mode, Challenge stages and even a nifty two-player option. Add in some gorgeous visuals and audio and the end result is an excellent new update.

DARRAN JONES

» Score **79%**

N64: A Visual Compendium

Buy it for: £29.99
Buy it from: bitmapbooks.com

The N64 is an odd choice for the *Visual Compendium* series. Its drab-looking polygons and fog-filled environments just don't sell the console in the same way as the pixel art of earlier books in the series did, which is a shame. Having said that, the book's editorial content is superb. While its non-interview anecdotes are fine, the developer input is genuinely outstanding. There's fascinating insight, particularly from Shigeru Miyamoto and other Nintendo veterans, which instantly separates this lovely tome from similar books on the market; while the sections that look at the machine itself, its controller and add-ons are just as insightful. It might not focus on the entire library of games or be as much of a looker as previous books in the series, but this remains the most essential book on the console in recent memory. Don't miss it.

DARRAN JONES

Arzette: The Jewel Of Faramore

» **System:** Switch (tested), PS4, PS5, Xbox Series X/S, PC » **Buy it for:** £17.99
» **Buy it from:** Online, limitedrungames.com

It's not often that FMV is deliberately awful, but this platformer's animated scenes are just that, as they're designed to affectionately parody the scenes in notorious CD-i games. The action controls well and Arzette gains a range of abilities that will allow you to access new areas upon revisiting levels. However, combat proves frustrating – every enemy that uses projectiles fires them straight at you, and the collision detection is highly unforgiving. Fortunately checkpoints are frequent and this becomes less of an issue as Arzette becomes more mobile, so we could put up with it.

NICK THORPE

» Score **76%**

THE GAME AWARDS

BEST FIGHTING GAME 2023
- NOMINEE -

POCKET BRAVERY

CLASH HEAD-TO-HEAD IN A RETRO-INSPIRED 2D FIGHTER

OUT NOW ON STEAM

PRE-ORDER NOW FOR CONSOLES!

NINTENDO SWITCH · PS5 · PS4 · XBOX XS · XBOX ONE

STATERA STUDIO

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PQube

THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>

<!--- [GAME BOY COLOR] THE AXE IS ONE OF THE EXTRA WEAPONS AVAILABLE IN THE DEMO. --->

<INTRO> WITH THE RELEASE OF THE ANALOGUE DUO, THERE'S RENEWED INTEREST IN THE PC ENGINE. WE REVIEWED THE STRATEGY GAME STRIFE SISTERS LAST TIME, NOW WE BRING YOU THE FIRST LOOK AT A NEW PLATFORM GAME WITH NINJAS FOR THE CONSOLE. WE ALSO HAVE A FANTASTIC NEW DRACULA GAME WITH AN INTERESTING STORY BEHIND IT, A GREAT MIX OF REVIEWS, AND A DEBUT GAME FOR THE C64 HARKING BACK TO A CLASSIC ARCADE TITLE </INTRO>

<MAIN HEADER>

DRACULA DONE RIGHT

<INTRO> STOKERVERSE WRITER CHRIS MCAULEY AND DEVELOPER CHRIS BEACH ARE CREATING THE FIRST FULLY LICENSED DRACULA GAME – DRACULA: DARK REIGN </INTRO>

<!--- STOKERVERSE WRITER CHRIS MCAULEY. --->

<BODY> **"I remember most of the titles based around Bram Stoker's book being very disappointing,"** says Chris McAuley, before explaining how he got involved in a new venture. "Dacre Stoker originally asked me to write a comic book based on one of Bram Stoker's short stories. It became incredibly popular. We started to look at *Dracula* together and came up with the idea of a horror universe based on Bram Stoker's books and research, The StokerVerse. Having a videogame was very important to me." Spacebot Interactive is developing that first game with Incube8 as publisher.

"For Dacre and I to provide the licence means that we give the developers access to Bram Stoker's notes and research, as well as a place within the established canon of the series," continues McAuley. "There were 110 pages removed from the original *Dracula* novel which showed various creatures and Dracula getting up to all sorts of grizzly stuff. We use this and Bram Stoker's research as well as elements from the StokerVerse RPG and comic books. I gave the basic outline to Spacebot who ran with the ideas beautifully. I was consulted about the type of game that we should do, and we all agreed on a Metroidvania-style title. I worked with Spacebot in examining which characters should be included in the various stages. Dacre and I then consulted about the mood and tone of the game."

McAuley hints at more games in the StokerVerse in the future. "I would like to push further into the timeline bringing the undead with me."

Dracula: Dark Reign starts with Jonathan Harker trapped inside Castle Dracula and resembles a certain other franchise that featured vampires, as developer Chris Beach explains. "I think it's hard to avoid the game being influenced by the *Castlevania* series when making a Metroidvania-type game based on *Dracula*, seeing as the *Castlevania* series is also based on Bram Stoker's characters. I think the thing that sets it apart is the fact

SPOOKY SOFTWARE

VAMPIRE VENGEANCE
C64

<Recently converted from the ZX Spectrum, consume the blood of the guards to return to the sanctuary of your coffin. />

RAMIRO THE VAMPYRE 4
Amstrad CPC

<This series of Mojon Twins' arcade adventures moved to ancient Egypt in this instalment as you find helpful items around the pyramid. />

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

THE YEAR IS 1897, AND JONATHAN HARKER, A HAPLESS SOLICITOR FROM ENGLAND HAS FOUND HIMSELF ENSNARED IN THE CLUTCHES OF THE ENIGMATIC COUNT DRACULA.

<!--- [GAME BOY COLOR] THE FIRST ROOM FEATURES A GHOSTLY BREEZE, A NEAT EFFECT. --->

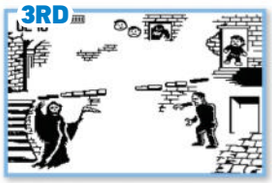
<!--- [GAME BOY COLOR] HERE'S PART OF DRACULA: DARK REIGN'S INTRO SEQUENCE. --->

<!--- DRACULA: DARK REIGN'S COVER ART --->

that it tells the story as intended. It certainly sets itself apart from the *Castlevania* Game Boy games due to the amount of attention to detail in the character sprites, environments and mechanics."

Beach is developing the new game in GB Studio. "You have to be very creative when developing a game like this for GBC even with the quality-of-life features that GB Studio brings," he explains. "Fitting all character animation frames into VRAM has been the biggest challenge so far, the game is still in development however and I'm sure we'll come up against some more obstacles before completion. Knowing that there will be a physical product that people can cherish at the end of development definitely helps the team push on and we're very much looking forward to the end product." </BODY>

<INTRO> MORE GHASTLY GOINGS-ON IN RETRO GAMING... </INTRO>



3RD

ZX TERROR HOUSE

ZX Spectrum

Based on a 1982 LCD handheld, dodge the monsters (beautifully drawn by Fransouls) across two screens in this impressive port by Menyiques. />

12TH

THE ABBEY(S) OF THE DEAD

Amiga

One of two Amiga conversions of the Locomalito original, AB UltraNarwhal's version adds a second abbey to explore with a female character. />

13TH

SCREAM QUEEN

ZX Spectrum

In development by PuttyCAD and his son, you must survive long enough to wake up in this game filled with horror-movie references. />

NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

Amstrad CPC: *The Mandarin II: Limoncello's Revenge* from Mananuk is available in GX4000, disk and tape formats, as well as Spectrum 48K and 128K versions. Find it at mananuk.itch.io />

Apple II: Sean Callahan's *Applz* is a clever demake of the mobile app *Ballz*. Download it from bit.ly/applz-apple2 />

Atari ST: French developer Electric Dreams released the current version of *Nano Cave* at Sillyventure 2023. It's a rogue-style dungeon explorer still in development and is planned to feature multiple retro skins. Delve into its story at bit.ly/nanocave-st />

Atari XL/XE: Vega, Kaz and Miker converted BBC Micro shoot-'em-up *Cyborg Warriors*. You'll find it at bit.ly/cyborgwarriors-xl />

BBC Micro: Julian Mander and Ian Berry released *Terkon* for the Model B, originally written back in 1989. Find it at bit.ly/terkon-bbc />

Game Boy Color: RubenRetro's *Powerball: Monster's Quest* mixes *Arkanoid* and RPG-style upgrading, with Bitmap Soft to publish the physical cartridge. There's more info if you bounce over to bit.ly/powerball-gb />

NES: Check out the demos of puzzle games *Soko-Banana* (top) from Flip For Fate bit.ly/sokobanana – and *Cursed Crown* by Martin Reimer bit.ly/cursedcrown

Then head over to The RetroVerse to play 200 different NES titles at various stages of development, in association with NESMaker. They can be found at theretroverse.com />

Saturn: Z-Team announced the Saturn conversion in progress of its *Castlevania* tribute, *Maria Renard's Revenge*. Read more at bit.ly/maria-saturn />

ZX Spectrum: Ed Toovey of Taskmaster Software 'won' the honour of hosting the comp.sys.sinclair Crap Game Competition 2024 – csscgc24.blogspot.com

The results for the 2023 competition can be found at bit.ly/csscgc-2023 />

CHAMPION CODER

ANTOINE FANTYS

<INTRO> AFTER SIX MONTHS OF DEVELOPMENT, ANTOINE REVEALS HIS BRAND-NEW PC ENGINE TITLE </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: JAPAN (ORIGINALLY FROM CZECHIA) WEBSITE: VECTREX28.ITCH.IO FORMAT: VARIOUS PREVIOUS GAMES: WORDLE (NES), BLAZING BLOCKS (NES), THE GREAT FUMO BINNING (PC ENGINE) WORKING ON: SPECIAL NINJA SQUAD AKA NINJA BUTAI (PC ENGINE) />

WHAT ARE THE KEY TOOLS USED?

<I use PCEAS assembler. The rest had to be made entirely from scratch (which is part of the appeal). I have a program I wrote that handles most graphic conversions and level-making, as well as a few Python scripts to do other things – such as converting music from Furnace (which will hopefully get even easier after successful pestering for text export in that tracker), and static screens (the title screen, level select, etc). Another huge help for emulating and debugging is MESEN 2's newly added PC Engine support./>

WHAT INFLUENCED YOUR NEW TITLE, SPECIAL NINJA SQUAD?

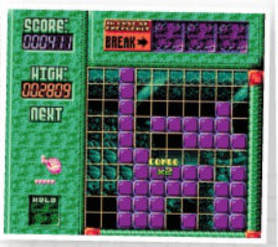
<I'm currently living in Japan, so I've had the idea of making a game with more Japanese themes. Japanese people at the pub/conventions (I bring my PC Engine GT there) absolutely love it, and it feels right at home. I'm a huge fan of Natsume games, especially *Shatterhand*, so I wanted to make a game that's an homage to those. One person at a convention successfully recognised the style too, which made me very happy. I wanted to have an engine for platforming games, and I wanted to make a HuCard game, specifically a platformer as I believe there could be more games of that genre on the PC Engine./>

<!--- ANTOINE, WITH THE NINJA BUTAI DEMO RUNNING ON HIS PORTABLE PC ENGINE GT. --->

WHAT IS LEFT TO DO?

<The base engine is getting there, but after that, it will be everything else, such as levels, enemies, bosses, and all of that. Once that core engine gets there, it's mostly design, with code mostly on enemies and bosses. It's going to be a digital download on Itch for a very fair price, and I will try and make a physical version too!/>

<!--- [PC ENGINE] THE GREAT FUMO BINNING IS INSPIRED BY KABOOM!, WITH YOU CATCHING ANIME PLUSHIES AND USED COPIES OF METROID: OTHER M. --->



<!--- [NES] COLOURFUL PUZZLE GAME BLAZING BLOCKS SEES YOU CLEARING HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL LINES. --->

<!--- [PC ENGINE] OUR NINJA HERO IS VERY AGILE AND ABLE TO ATTACK WHILE HANGING FROM A WALL. --->

DATA BURST

TOXIC TOMB

<INFO FORMAT: WINDOWS CREDITS: LOCOMALITO (CODE, DESIGN), GRYZOR87 (MUSIC), JACOB GARCIA (ILLUSTRATION) PRICE: FREE WEB: BIT.LY/TOXICTOMB />

<BODY> **There's trouble at the Prykusa multicore power plant, with Response Teams 1 and 2 missing.** The demon hunter Lime Eyes has been called in and must deal with the biological infestation – caused by transdimensional ectoplasmic slime feeding on the power! Lime Eyes must navigate nine levels, which involves dealing with the generators producing slime there and destroying the roaming slime that warp in. Destroyed generators leave behind power-ups including health, extra bullet power, and stars, while creating a combo of kills will boost your score (you need 75,000 points to earn an extra life). Once all the generators are destroyed, a central reactor must be stopped, which reveals a tough boss slime to take down.

This stylish game was inspired by Sega's Master System and the palette from games such as *Psychic World* and *Fantasy Zone*. An optional CRT filter and game surround add to the retro effect, while excellent music and sound FX play alongside *Toxic Tomb*'s well-crafted gameplay. One clever aspect we do like is how the enemy slime changes type and behaviour as you move through the levels, while bosses have unique attack patterns to learn. There's also some neat achievements to extend longevity. This is an enjoyable platform romp that will appeal to many players, but it's certainly no pushover. </BODY>

SCORE: 87%

<!--- [PC] SHOOT THE SMALL GENERATOR TO DESTROY IT: THE SMALL BARRELS HIDE BONUS STARS. --->

<!--- [PC] THE FIRST LEVEL'S GUARDIAN FLIES AROUND, THEN PAUSES TO SHOOT AT YOU. --->

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<!--- [PLUS/4] THE GORGEOUS MAP SCREEN IS PART OF THE EXCELLENT INTRO SEQUENCE. --->

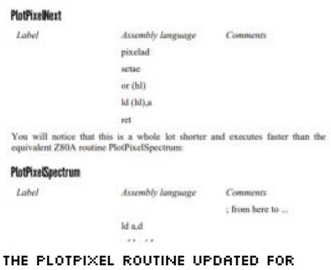
<!--- [PLUS/4] DRIVING AT NIGHT – THE CHANGING SIDE GRAPHICS AND SKY COLOURS GIVE A VERY CONVINCING EFFECT. --->

TURBO OUTRUN

<INFO FORMAT: PLUS/4 CREDITS: TCFS, CSABO, UNREAL, CHRONOS
PRICE: FREE WEB: BIT.LY/TURBO-PLUS4 />

<BODY> **This is another superb conversion from the team behind the recent *Lemmings* adaptation (RG 251).** Drive your Ferrari F40 against a competing Porsche across 16 stages representing the USA. Reach the checkpoint against the clock; after every fourth stage, you can upgrade your car. The superb presentation recreates the look of Probe's impressive C64 game, and the music is outstanding throughout. The 3D effect is convincing with a good variety of scenery, and it's even more remarkable considering the hardware limitations (the Plus/4 has no hardware sprites). The gameplay is spot on too, with just enough challenge to keep you playing – or coasting to the checkpoint with seconds to spare. These guys continue to impress us, so hit the gas and download it now! </BODY>

SCORE: 90%


PlotPixelNext

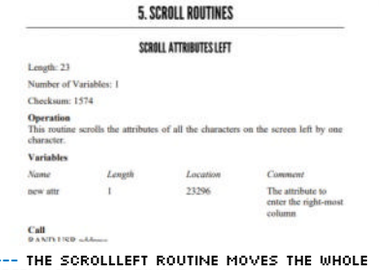
Label	Assembly language	Comments
	pixelad	
	setae	
	or (hl)	
	ld (hl),a	
	ret	

You will notice that this is a whole lot shorter and executes faster than the equivalent Z80A routine PlotPixelSpectrum:

PlotPixelSpectrum

Label	Assembly language	Comments
		; from here to ...
	ld a,d	

<!--- THE PLOTPIXEL ROUTINE UPDATED FOR SINCLAIR NEXT BY JIM BAGLEY. --->


5. SCROLL ROUTINES

SCROLL ATTRIBUTES LEFT

Length: 23
Number of Variables: 1
Checksum: 1574

Operation
This routine scrolls the attributes of all the characters on the screen left by one character.

Variables

Name	Length	Location	Comment
new attr	1	23296	The attribute to enter the right-most column

Call

<!--- THE SCROLLLEFT ROUTINE MOVES THE WHOLE SCREEN LEFT BY 8 PIXELS. --->

40 BEST MACHINE CODE ROUTINES FOR THE ZX SPECTRUM 4TH EDITION

<!--- THE COVER FEATURES GORGEOUS VOXEL ARTWORK OF CLASSIC SPECTRUM CHARACTERS BY MIKE BERRY. --->

<INFO FORMAT: PAPERBACK CREDITS: ANDREW HEWSON, JOHN HARDMAN & JIM BAGLEY PRICE: UK £18.99 / EU £22.99 / ROW £29.99 (PRICES INCLUDE SHIPPING) WEB: HUEYGAMES.COM/BOOKS />

<BODY> **This updated Hewson book starts with an introduction to Z80 machine code.** The new chapter by Jim Bagley reworks certain routines for the Spectrum Next before a memory map and list of the Z80 instructions. An entry program helps you type in the main routines, split into scroll routines, display routines, routines to manipulate BASIC programs, and toolkit routines. A new Appendix lists ZX Spectrum Memories from the Elite Kickstarter backers. This book won't teach you everything Z80 – but it gives a structured approach to building your own work. </BODY>

PROCESSING

<INTRO> SPY AGENT IS RADEK BURKAT'S C64 DEBUT – REMAKING THE CLASSIC TAITO ARCADE TITLE ELEVATOR ACTION </INTRO>

<BODY> **Radek Burkat has an interesting way of tackling old age.** "After you turn 50, people say you should do puzzles to exercise your mind. Forget that. Just try to write a game in assembler for the C64!" So how did this exercise come about? "I started looking into the C64 last September and the learning curve has been steep but very enjoyable," Radek says. "Lots of people on the Lemon64 forum have been giving amazing advice. I have done the graphics and the code, but when I put up my basic attempt at using the SID, DMX (Vidar Bang) jumped in and created way better music and SFX."

Despite the progress made, Radek admits it's not the easiest first game to tackle. "Scrolling up/down along with moving lots of background objects while scrolling and enemies being able to transition floors has been a challenge to synchronise. I decided to quickly make *Elevator Deathmatch* as a two-player game, as it's a static part of the level that I use to test elements of the game. I'm fairly confident that I'll be able to release the game this year." </BODY>

<!--- [C64] SHOOTING THE LIGHTS PRODUCES THE CLASSIC EFFECT OF MAKING THE SCREEN DARKER FOR A WHILE. --->

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

» *WipEout* is one of Nick's favourite series, so Rory Milne's recent feature was a favourite of his.

FAVOURITE FEATURES

The team shares its most memorable magazine moments

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

Since we're celebrating our 20th anniversary, we thought we'd take another chance to be just a wee bit self-indulgent and celebrate some of the best work to have appeared in **Retro Gamer** – as well as remembering some of the tougher tasks we've crossed paths with.

NICK

It's not an easy question since we've got over 250 issues to choose from, but what are some of your favourite **Retro Gamer** features?

DARRAN

If we're talking cover features I'd probably pick the recent Rare article we did for issue 250. Looking back at older articles, Craig Grannell's *Pac-Man* Making Of from **RG** 61 is one of my personal favourites.

» Craig Grannell's *Pac-Man* feature also covered the creation of the excellent *Championship Edition*.

TIM

If we're not talking cover features, then it's the A Tribute To ones listing loads of games with developers' recollections on most of the games. It's a neat package of information and nostalgia.

DARRAN

Those A Tribute To articles have proven to be really popular. It debuted with a banger as well in the form of Treasure.

NICK

After playing the Konix Multisystem emulator on *Llamasoft: A Jeff Minter Story* recently, I was reminded of how much I enjoyed the feature on the console way back in **RG** 8. I'd never heard of it before and the story was fascinating.

DARRAN

Agreed, that Konix feature was excellent. John Szczepaniak also did a really interesting article on the *Starflight* games, which I think ran across two issues. One of the things I loved about those early issues is that it covered a lot of home computer stuff that I had missed as I embraced consoles early.

> "It's always fascinating to see what's going to be in a new issue"
> TIM EMPEY

THE MAKING AND REMAKING OF...
PAC-MAN
THE MAKING & REMAKING OF: PAC-MAN
CRAIG GRANNELL TALKS TO TORU IWATANI ABOUT HOW HE CREATED THE MOST ICONIC CHARACTER IN VIDEOGAMES HISTORY, DEVISED ONE OF THE MOST ENDURING AND COPIED GAME FORMATS, AND HOW HE REVISITED HIS CREATION FOR XBOX 360
IN THE KNOW

NICK

I always liked John's features that dug into more obscure territory. I remember Gaming Illuminati in issue 35, mostly because one interviewee claimed to have bought guns over a *Sonic X-Treme* prototype. *Sonic* fans can be a bit much, but… really?

DARRAN

Ah yes, I remember John being rather proud of that article. Another two-parter. So Tim, as a relative newcomer to the mag (three years now), what do you look for in a good **Retro Gamer** article?

TIM

It's always fascinating to see what's going to be in a new issue. There's usually something I've either played when I was wee, or reviewed when I was on other magazines back in the day. Or whatever insane quote from me that Nick dredges up for Back To The Noughties. So, I left games journalism in 2009 to get a master's degree (which either means I'm dead smart, or it's a damning indictment on the education system), but came back to mags in 2018 after working on newspapers. So what'd I miss? Were there any features that were incredibly difficult to do?

NICK

One of the earliest ones I did, The Scariest Moments Of All Time, was a different kind of

nightmare to what I expected. Horror games don't tend to have cheats that let you skip to specific sections, so getting all the screenshots I needed was a total pig of a job.

DARRAN

Ah yes, I remember that one, Nick. Getting access to Japanese developers can be tough, but it's certainly become a lot easier for us in recent years. Difficult issues in the past have often been due to planned covers changing for one reason or another, leaving us scrambling for something else. Our Icarus moment was definitely **RG** 200. We flew way too close to the sun for that particular issue.

NICK

Yeah, the concept of packing a condensed history of games into one issue was crazy. What nearly broke us was the timeline running along the bottom of the pages, we were up gone midnight checking and re-checking that all the dates were in order.

TIM

Ah yes, **RG** 200 (which I still haven't got a copy of yet), there was a really good cover on that one. Did it win any inter-company award?

DARRAN

Funny story, Tim. There used to be these in-house competitions where the best-selling or best-designed covers would win some vouchers. We felt we were shoe-ins for that particular issue but we lost out to a bag of chips.

NICK

They didn't even have any ketchup on them. Utterly shameful, really.

DARRAN

To be fair, I did think they looked incredibly tasty. So Tim, as a recent member of the mag what new articles have you enjoyed?

» A celebratory deep dive into Rare marked the 250th issue of **Retro Gamer**. This kind of feature is something we feel we do really well.

TIM

The Evolution Of *The Last Ninja*. My brother and I played those a lot on the C64, so it was brilliant to see the screens and read the interviews. I took a photo to show my brother hoping he'd buy the mag. But he didn't, bah!

DARRAN

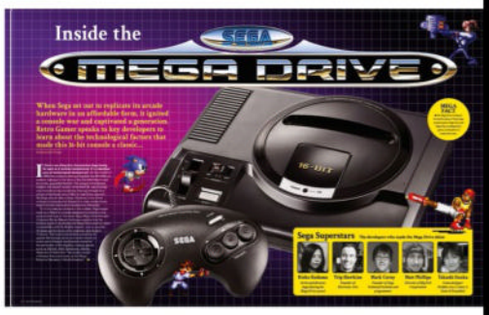
We've had a lot of good The Evolution Of features, and many of them have been by Rory Milne. I think The Evolution Of series is a good example of us finding a new way to tell an old story. What do you think, Nick?

NICK

Yeah, I've always liked them and they've given us some really cool covers, like *WipEout* recently. I also like the very offbeat features, like Lewis Packwood's piece on the retailer Special Reserve or Graeme Mason's piece Gaming Obsessions.

DARRAN

That's one of the cool things about receiving pitches, you never quite know what you're going to get. And that's probably one of the reasons we're still around. There's always something interesting to read in the mag and sometimes I don't even mention *Strider*.



» Nick likes doing these technical features because he gets to indulge his nerdiest tendencies.

» We think all of our siblings should buy **Retro Gamer**, to be honest. Even the teenagers.

» Learning how games are made is interesting, but what we do with them is equally fascinating.

READERS REACT

What is your favourite Retro Gamer feature?

Joel J Games
One of my favourites was the *Bubble Bobble* cover feature from a few years back with the break down of the (many) ports.

Jeff Bone
The history of *Ninja Turtles* in videogames. It got me excited and ready for *The Cowabunga Collection* that was coming out.

Lee Jackson
The behind the scenes feature for *NiGHTS Into Dreams* in issue 45. As someone who didn't know much about the game at the time, it was a fascinating read and one that lead me to actually buying a copy. Nowadays, it's one of my favourite games so thanks, **Retro Gamer**!

Martin K Dodd
One of the early issues had a feature on how to build your own arcade machine step by step. With all these mini arcades appearing perhaps a new updated feature is required? [That's a good idea – Ed]

Robert August de Meijer
The one with Chris Crawford, such an amazing guy who meant so much to the industry and understanding of the medium!

Joe Martin
I love that Martyn Carroll reached out across the pond for my information about *Nemesis* in issue 72 for the cover story.

Richard Hazeldine
For me anything that covers 8-bit (especially the C64). However, the *Doom* issue was a particular highlight, a literal game-changer insofar as it heralded the FPS and invented the genre.

Ben Segaman
146. The Neo Geo special. The very first issue I bought after reading about your magazine in the German *GamePro*. I found your magazine when visiting a city 90km from where I live, I walked into a bookshop and hallelujah, there you are.

Blake
Issue 235 The History Of *Wonder Boy* feature is prob my fav as I LOVE that series and you guys hit it out of the park with the visuals. I also loved issue 170 *Final Fantasy* 30th Anniversary Special feature. I was so blown away by your work I bought a subscription that day, that I've kept going since.

Robert Mitcham
Matt Smith giving his insights into all the *Manic Miner* levels in a semi-drunken haze really captured a nostalgic snapshot of the early years of bedroom coders.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

MIGHT AND MAGIC IV: CLOUDS OF XEEN
"Crazy skeleton character Xeen and his faithful dragon. This painting is a combination of brush painting and airbrush with lots of colour."
AMOUNT PAID: NA

WOLFCHILD
"This powerful fantasy horror painting uses bold colour and contrast. That is me in the lower right-hand corner."
AMOUNT PAID: NA

POWER BLADE
"This painting is a self-portrait and one of my favourites. In the original reference photo, I am holding a T-square under my studio lights."
AMOUNT PAID: NA

BIO

NAME:
Mike Winterbauer

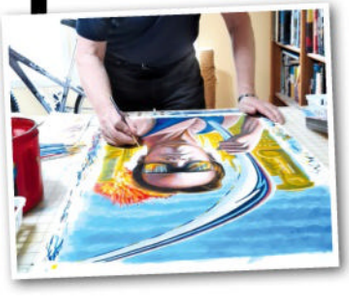
LOCATION:
USA

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
NA

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
PC

FAVOURITE GAME:
Might And Magic IV: Clouds Of Xeen

WEBSITE:
winterbauerarts.com



THE BOX ART COLLECTOR

Mike Winterbauer paints his own collection story

We have a special Collector Corner this month that focusses on Mike Winterbauer's collection of his videogame artwork. Mike started working in the industry during the "golden age of gaming". He tells us that, "This was before the digital age, there was no internet and very few cell phones. The games I painted cover art for were made with exciting new 8-bit and 16-bit technology. These were exciting times as I painted cool covers for games running on new platforms like the NES, SNES, Game Boy, Sega CD and PC."

Mike explains that his first videogame cover was for *War Eagles*, a World War I simulation. "I was very happy to get this job and did the painting large, 24 by 36 inches in oil paint. After getting a taste of doing cover art for a videogame company I knew there must be many more videogame companies in the Los Angeles area. I excitedly made lists of videogame companies to show my work to. After persevering for a while the game cover jobs started coming in".

We asked Mike what assignments have been his favourites over the years. "*The Might And Magic: Clouds Of Xeen* and *Darkside Of Xeen* covers, maps and manuals were my favourite projects to work on. I knew these were highly visible projects and put my heart and soul into these pieces. The role-playing genre is well-suited to creating wonderful fantasy paintings and drawings! I was fortunate to be able to paint the cool covers and very interesting maps that were included in the game boxes."

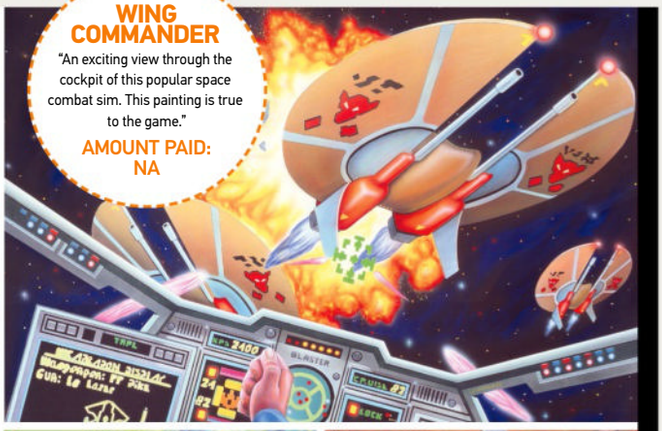
As an artist, Mike feels it's important to keep hold of your original work. "By retaining your physical art, you can make copies and promote yourself in the years to come. Having excellent reproductions of my art I was able to make high-quality prints of my work, document and promote my art. I stored well over 100 paintings for 25 years until there was an interest in retro game art."

And speaking of storing all these paintings, how does Mike find the space? "Storing a large collection of paintings is difficult and great care must be used to ensure they stay in beautiful condition," we're told. "I kept my work in large protective boxes, each painting covered with a sheet of acetate and heavy paper cover." Mike has recently sold some of his artwork and feels that, "It was important to get the original game art paintings into the marketplace. I did this with the hope that they would become more collectable and resold. Around this time, retro gaming had become more popular, and I was very happy with the response I received from selling my art. This encouraged me to make prints and repaint some of the more popular originals. I've also done many crowdfunding projects for prints and books of my art."

We finish by asking Mike how he feels that gamers still enjoy his work today. "It's a wonderful feeling, I'm grateful and flattered that gamers still enjoy seeing my cover art. Over the years I've gotten many nice comments from people who enjoyed my game art as young adults. This makes it all worthwhile to me."

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com



WING COMMANDER

"An exciting view through the cockpit of this popular space combat sim. This painting is true to the game."

AMOUNT PAID: NA

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

SOLSTICE: THE QUEST FOR THE STAFF OF DEMNOS

■ "My favourite game painting. I love how this ripped wizard embraces life with his power. He is very much alive and ready to go!"

PAID: NA

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

RETRO GAMER ISSUE 1

If you want to head back to where it all began you won't need too much cash. Complete copies typically hit **£20,** while the reprint (shown here) from issue 100 is considerably cheaper, so make sure you're getting the right version.

TEMPEST 2000

Jeff Minter's tube shooter remains one of the Jaguar's best games with mint copies costing over **£70,** boxed copies around the **£40** mark, and loose carts selling for **£25.** Now get blasting!

FABLE

This classic Xbox adventure won't take much from your gold stash as copies can be bought for under **£4,** while complete copies rarely go for more than **£7.**

COUNTER-STRIKE

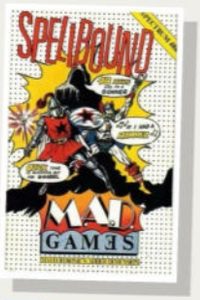
There's no need to get blown away reloading your Xbox with this iconic shooter. Used copies can be found for about **£2,** while decent copies with manuals rarely sell for more than **£5.**

DAXTER

You'll be jumping for joy knowing the platinum version of this great platformer can be purchased for as little as **£2.** The original version sells for less than **£7.** So what are you waiting for?

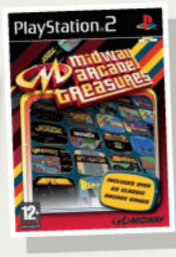
SONIC R

Featuring cracking songs by Richard Jacques, a decent copy of *Sonic R* on Saturn will set you back around **£40,** while used copies can be had for just over **£30.**



SPELLBOUND

The standard version of Mastertronic's classic adventure can be picked up for as little as **£3,** although a copy of the more uncommon 128K-only version recently sold for **£40.**



MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES

If you want the PlayStation 2 version of Digital Eclipse's compilation so you can enjoy *Super Sprint* and other classics, PAL copies sell for just **£6.**

HOW MUCH?!

VIRTUAL BART

You might need to check your virtual reality headset settings, but this Japanese copy of *Virtual Bart* for the Mega Drive sold for just shy of **£4,000** recently. There were nearly 150 bids for this mint condition gem. Ay, caramba!

Prices correct at time of print

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

RIDING THE RETRO WAVE

David Crookes looks back over 20 years writing for Retro Gamer

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Martyn Carroll, the first editor of this marvellous magazine. In 2004, I'd spotted a small news item in the British journalism trade magazine, *Press Gazette*, heralding the first issue of **Retro Gamer** and I immediately approached Martyn with an idea: an article about *Dizzy*.

I'd freelanced as a writer before, for *Amstrad Action* and *Amiga Format*, both in my teenage years. From memory, it had taken about 12 months of pestering (and, believe me, pestering is the right word) in order for *AA*'s editor Dave Golder to cave in and give me an opportunity. When approaching Martyn, I didn't have the energy for such a pursuit again and decided it would be 'one approach, one rejection' and that would be that.

To my great surprise, Martyn replied almost immediately. He wanted the piece and reckoned it would be a great idea to contact Philip and Andrew Oliver for their views on this most eggs-cellent series. Was that possible? Would those gods of gaming respond? As it happened, yes, it was possible and yes, they would respond – to the point that they spent ages answering questions and they even sent over a hand-drawn map of *Fantasy World Dizzy*.

That map was both a blessing and a curse. We were both operating in the days when the internet didn't cope too well with humongous files and, while I was somehow able to receive the map, getting it over to Martyn at the Live Publishing offices proved to be rather challenging. Eventually, I found a way and, I discovered much later that it was very nearly printed as a gatefold spread where the map would have spread across four pages. Costs scuppered such thoughts, it's sad to say.

Still, something clicked. I really enjoyed writing that article and seeing it in print in issue two. The Olivers' enthusiasm had been infectious and Martyn's friendly approach made the entire process an utter joy. Desperate to rekindle my love of my childhood computers and consoles and with feelings of nostalgia waving over me, I realised there was lots of life left in these old systems and many stories that desperately needed to be told. As such, when Martyn asked me if I'd write something for issue four, I jumped at the opportunity. I wrote about the Amstrad CPC.

> "Retro Gamer awoke my desire to delve into gaming's history"
>
> **DAVID CROOKES**

Retro Gamer has been an important part of my life ever since. After Martyn left as editor following the collapse of Live Publishing, I've been forever grateful to Darran for continuing to commission and publish my work. This splendid magazine also led to many more opportunities for me. After tentatively approaching Martin Mathers, editor of *games™*, with an article idea I ended up penning a fair few pieces for that publication too. **Retro Gamer** had not only awoken my desire to delve into gaming's history, it deepened my passion for games as a whole.

In some ways, it was a perfect storm. The videogame magazine industry was in great shape at the time with publishers willing to experiment and enter new markets as and when new platforms emerged. I was enthused and on a mission to get my name into as many magazines as possible.

I went on to write for *360*, *X360*, *PSU3*, and *go>PLAY*. I became the news editor for the Nintendo mag, *n-Revolution*, and contributed to every issue of *Total PC Gaming* while also writing lots of its free cover-mounted books. I indulged my passion for technology and I branched out, writing about space, science, sci-fi, gadgets, history, sport and travel.

Had it not been for **Retro Gamer**, I wouldn't have achieved a personal ambition to edit a magazine dedicated to the *Amstrad CPC*. (*Amstrad Addict*, shameless plug). So thank you Martyn, thank you Darran and thank you to every reader who has ever bought this magazine and every writer who has kept it so fresh, so fun and so compelling every month. If I'm around when **Retro Gamer** turns 40, then I sincerely hope I'm still a little part of it.

MARVELLOUS MAGS

OTHER GREAT MAGAZINES RELEASED IN THE NOUGHTIES

GAMES™
games™ had up to 180 pages and included a brilliant retro section edited by Darran Jones and, later, Ashley Day.

GO>PLAY
It only lasted for 14 printed issues but this PSP-centric mag dived deep into the handheld's games and UMD movies.

N-REVOLUTION
Called *Revolution* for the first two of its 30 issues, this mag's editors included TOTAL legend Andy Dyer.

X360
This long-running mag for the Xbox 360 was once helmed by Simon Miller who has since become a talented wrestler.

TOTAL PC GAMING
A sadly missed PC gaming mag that ran a column by Stuart Campbell called Why I Hate PC Gamers.

TOTAL PC GAMING INCLUDED A RETRO SECTION FROM THE START AND OFTEN HAD RETRO-INSPIRED COVER-MOUNTED BOOKS.
PC Gaming
WORLD IN CONFLICT
SOVIET ASSAULT
EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW
BioWARE
Revolution
FOR NINTENDO
TWILIGHT PRINCESS
Wii TAKES ON THE WORLD
THIS MAG'S NAME HAD TO CHANGE BECAUSE THERE WAS A (NON-GAMING) REVOLUTION MAG ON THE MARKET!
AMSTRAD ADDICT
BEING ABLE TO EDIT A MAGAZINE DEDICATED TO THE AMSTRAD CPC HAS BEEN A DREAM COME TRUE.

I BET YOU CAN'T GUESS WHAT I WROTE ABOUT IN ISSUE 19! YUP!
"DIZZY WAS UNIQUE IN THAT IT COMBINED A STORY PLATFORM GAME PUZZLES, WIDELY ASSESSABLE GAMEPLAY AND FUN CHARACTERS"
I ACTUALLY RAN TO WHSMITH IN BOLTON TO SEE IF ISSUE 19 WAS IN STOCK! RETRO GAMER WAS BACK COURTESY OF IMAGINE PUBLISHING...
THE PSP QUICKLY BECAME MY FAVOURITE HANDHELD CONSOLE AND IT WAS ALWAYS A JOY WRITING ABOUT IT.
I WAS A CONSULTING EDITOR FOR A NUMBER OF GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS: GAMER'S EDITION BOOKS WHICH WAS GREAT FUN!
GAMES™ HAD AN ABSOLUTELY BRILLIANT RETRO SECTION. HEY, WHO'S THAT EGGS-CELLENT FELLOW WITH DAVID DARLING?
SOME GAMING MAGS RAN WITH SOME DODGY ADVERTS IN THE MID-2000S, DIDN'T THEY?
I WAS DIZZY WITH EXCITEMENT SEEING MY FIRST RETRO GAMER BYLINE IN ISSUE TWO – WHEN THE LAYOUTS WERE VERY DIFFERENT TO TODAY.
GO PLAY
UK's only monthly PSP magazine
SPECIAL LAUNCH ISSUE £3.49
grand theft auto
Liberty City Stories
EVERY PSP GAME RATED!
RUBBER LOVE
GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS 2015
PSP ONE YEAR ON
CODING BACK THE YEARS
TEKKEN
DARK RESURRECTION
ALWAYS USE PROTECTION
Fantastic Dizzy
DIZZY III
FANTASY WORLD DIZZY

WHAT IMPACT HAS RETRO GAMER HAD ON YOU?

Many readers have been inspired by Retro Gamer over the years

Chris Jowett
I've been reading for about five to six years now and it's the preservation of old titles, developers and software houses that I love and never letting those amazing people and games ever be forgotten.

Brian
The ONLY gaming magazine I still pay for upon release. It's filled with content from the best era in videogames. Period.

b1rdcor3_games
It's made me realise how much gaming and great games I haven't played. Definitely expanded my backlog and changed how I view some older systems I missed out on for various reasons.

Abel
It's been my personal time machine, and besides, they're way more fun than the current AAA games.

David S Thomas
I first discovered **Retro Gamer** when my wife was pregnant with our son in 2011. It was a fantastic reminder of the games and pixel art I loved as a kid. Then parenting took over and I only rediscovered it last year. I now read it with my son, who's now 12 and a keen gamer.

David Autovino
RG was one of the first publications where I was seeing in-depth, primary-source reporting on the history of the medium. Your first-hand interviews are priceless.

Alex79, OK?
It is a monthly reminder of my own mortality and the ever-encroaching finality of death. Thanks.

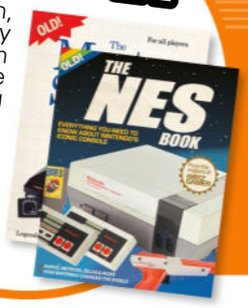
Paul Austin
I didn't start reading until early in lockdown. I'm now 53, and feel like I'm in a period in life where I get a safety blanket from reminiscing over things that were important to me when I was growing up.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – **TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of one of our classic retro books. Good luck everyone!



44 YEARS YOUNG

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I turn 44 today, so that means it was 32 years ago that on my 12th birthday I opened a copy of *Your Sinclair* magazine to find my request for tips on completing the Spectrum game *Flunky* had been published. What a present! Even at that age I said I feel like I'm 99 which is still true. They also sent me an 'I've got big tips' badge which mum probably still has at the back of a drawer somewhere. I successfully completed the game thanks to that help. Don Priestly did some great games with distinctive cartoony chunky graphics which blew my mind – *Trapdoor*, *Popeye* and the brilliant *Gregory Loses His Clock*. Have you considered a feature on his games before?
Keep up the good work.
Steve, Bristol

Happy birthday, Steve. Thanks for sharing your anecdote about *Your Sinclair*, you must have been well chuffed. With regards to Don Priestly, Darran interviewed him for *games™* years ago but he has proven to be very hard to get hold of in recent years. We'll reach out again and see what we can manage.

» Here is Steve's printed request for help on *Flunky* in *Your Sinclair*.

STAR LETTER

SHMUPS FOREVER

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Would you consider running an article on the greatest shmups of all time? I absolutely adore the genre and I know Darran is a big fan based on the game deliveries he shares on Twitter, so I'd love to see a really big feature in the magazine. While I appreciate that there is a lot more interest in the genre now, it still feels a little underground compared to platformers and first-person shooters. I can't remember the last time I read a good Making Of article about a shmup that I didn't read in **Retro Gamer**, so kudos for keeping the genre alive. I'm a particularly huge fan of Toaplan and Cave and I really enjoyed the article Will Freeman wrote recently about the former. So thank you **Retro Gamer** for continuing to celebrate my favourite genre, but I'd love it if you could really push the boat out in a later issue.
Regards,
Karen Peters

It's always nice to hear from a fellow shmup fan, Karen. Funnily enough, Will is actually hard at work on an article about how M2 converts the many great games by Toaplan and Cave for its popular *ShotTriggers* series, so look out for that soon. We'll send you out a book in the meantime, but we can't promise how much shmup coverage it will have in it.

» [Switch] The biggest crime about M2's *ShotTriggers* range is they're released overseas.

EA RULES

Greetings **Retro Gamer**,
I've been a subscriber since the COVID pandemic kicked off and have really enjoyed the magazine. It's a real blast of my youth. I'm 47 so my gaming experience runs right back to the Atari 2600 era, so the recent features on that console have been fantastic.

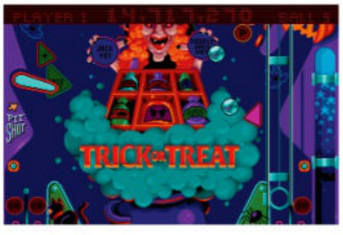
Recently I've been talking with mates about the Mega Drive days, specifically the slew of brilliant Electronic Arts games that appeared on it, which were almost all knockout titles. *EA Hockey*, *Desert Strike*, *F22 Interceptor*, *General Chaos* and, best of all, *Road Rash*. What a beautiful slick racer. Are there any plans to do a full feature, maybe the 16-bit glory days of EA?
Fred Rylands

» [Mega Drive] If this was a meme that rider with the club would have EA next to him while the other rider would be Nintendo.

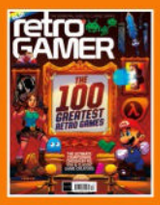
PINBALL MADNESS

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I'm trying to remember a pinball game I used to play on my Mega Drive. I can't remember its name, but there were some really colourful tables and I can remember one of them featured a big whale. I'm pretty sure the ball could turn into an animal as well. Do you know what it is as I'd love to play it again.
William Turner

You're in luck, William. The



» [Mega Drive] We really should do a Making Of article about *Psycho Pinball*, it's great fun.



CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, Somerset, BA1 1UA

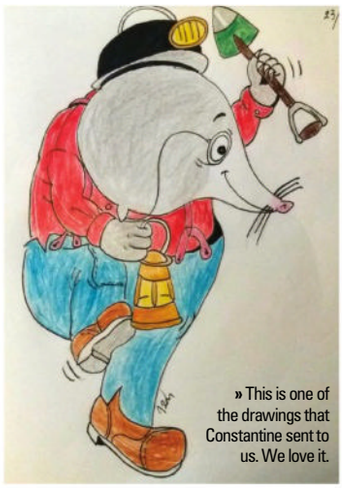
Email: retrogamer@futurenet.com

game in question is *Psycho Pinball*. It's actually available on the Codemasters Evercade collection if you have a system handy. Enjoy.

HOLY MOLY!

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I am 50 years old. In 1985 I visited Vasilis' house (Vasilis was a school mate back then). He was kind enough to show me his latest acquisition – a ZX Spectrum. At first, I did not understand much while he was explaining to me about that rubber keyboard machine. But when he loaded *Wanted: Monty Mole*, I got really excited. I could not believe my eyes that it was possible to play such a lovely game in the comfort of your own house! That particular game drove me nuts, really. After I left Vasilis' house, for months I could not forget that unique experience with that naughty mole. And that was it: I had made my decision to get a ZX Spectrum just to play *Wanted* all day long, much to my mother's dismay. Recently, I bought all the *Monty Mole* games for Steam Deck just to get back in time and become that 12-year-old boy who visited Vasilis' house in 1985.



» This is one of the drawings that Constantine sent to us. We love it.

Please, is it possible to write an article about the whole series? I'd love a Making Of *Monty Mole* or even an Ultimate Guide about *Wanted: Monty Mole*?

Thank you in advance!

Constantine Chatoupis

Thanks for your charming letter, Constantine. We ran The Story Of *Monty Mole*, covering all the games, all the way back in RG 96. We'll see if we can get Peter Harrap for a *Wanted: Monty Mole* Ultimate Guide.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

20 Years Of Retro Gamer

What else would we have been talking about? Nick has spent a fair amount of time reading extracts from The Book Of JibJob (many of which are too rude to print here), Tim has been lamenting not being part of the team while we were in the office, while Darran has been having a recurring dream that his bookshelf will fall on him, burying him forever under 20 years' worth of magazines.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What game/system would you put on RG's cover?

Lord Arse!
The Commodore PET and a feature on those lovely black and green games from back in the day.

The British Monkey
The Xbox 360, PS3 and Wii. Time to acknowledge they're now retro!

RetroBob
I'd love to see a detailed in-game screenshot of either *Command & Conquer*, or *Red Alert*. I think it could look badass.

Nick Westwood
Probably a random suggestion, but I'd love to see an issue covering Java mobile phone games, so for the cover, a Nokia or Motorola? It's an important and often forgotten part of gaming history! [I like this – Ed]

Lee Jackson
The GBA. After seeing the recent letters to the mailbag about the topic, I have to agree. I would love to see a deep dive covering the system and its amazing catalogue of games.

guttertrash
A good old-fashioned beige PC. Bonus points for a monitor that extends back 15-feet.

Woody2610
The House Of The Dead. It's arguably the face of the lightgun genre, and with said genre dying out, it'd be good to see publications shine light onto what made it so awesome.

John Maguire
It has got to be the Atari Lynx. The way it looked. The graphic capabilities. The multiplayer link. Completely ahead of its time. Shame about the battery life though.

» [Saturn] Phil Locke wants *Guardian Heroes* on **RG**'s cover. Would you pick it up?

Phil Locke
Saturn, *Guardian Heroes*. Every single month!

Stuart Atkinson
An Oscilloscope featuring *Tennis For Two*. The beginning of videogaming, all hail its glowing greeness!

retro GAMER

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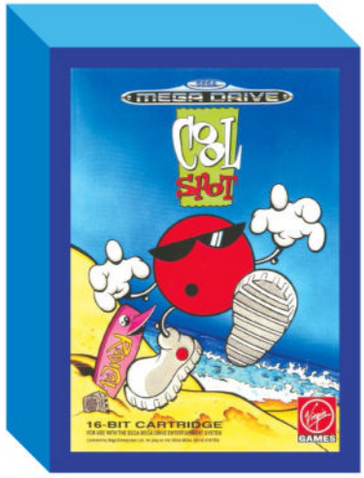
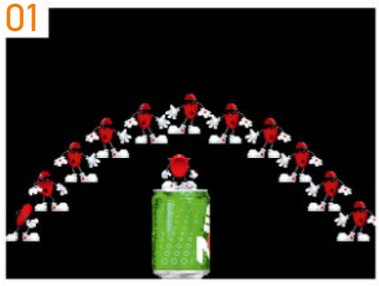
ENDGAME



COOL SPOT

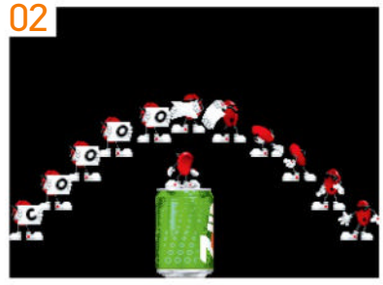
» Cool Spot is cool. How do we know this? Well, because it's in his name. He also wears sunglasses all the time, and he's red like a Ferrari. Still, he has a nagging feeling that things aren't quite right, so he sets off to rescue his fellow flat, disc-shaped brethren and maybe find out what's bothering him. Let's see how that goes, shall we?

01



» Having completed his quest, Cool Spot must now face the judgement of The Council Of Spots. It's all very well for him to say he's cool, but everybody knows that it's your peers that decide if you're actually cool.

02



» Things are looking good – he's got the "Coooo" bit down, but Cool Spot mustn't get presumptuous. The Council has been known to bust out the old "Coooooook Pass Babtridge" routine for a laugh sometimes.

03

» Never mind, everything's OK. Cool Spot has been officially declared cool! In fact, he's so cool that he got six extra letters and an exclamation mark, which is basically equivalent to a degree in cool terms.

04

» Having achieved everything it set out to, The Council Of Spots adjourns its meeting. Never mind the competition from Sprite, never mind the threat of a vengeful Fido Dido looking to reclaim his place on 7up cans, Cool Spot is cool. It's a rather image-obsessed organisation, to be honest.

05

» So now, Cool Spot stands alone. He knows he's cool. He's been told that he's cool. Why, then, does he suddenly feel so empty? Obviously, it's because nobody is here to see how cool he is. Once again, Cool Spot sets off to regain what every cool person ultimately craves – attention.

CONGRATULATIONS ON 20 YEARS OF RETRO GREATNESS

FROM THE ATARI TEAM

happy 20, retro gamer!!

play date®

we look forward to collecting the next 20 years. from your friends at play.date

THE
COMPLETE
HISTORY OF
retro
GAMER

THE COMPLETE

HISTORY OF RETRO GAMER

For our 20th anniversary we felt like doing something a little different, a little indulgent. In your hands is a behind-the-scenes look at your favourite magazine, and while it won't be filled with salacious content and controversies, it should hopefully offer a better insight into what it's like working on a magazine like **Retro Gamer** and the challenges (and fun) we have making it on a monthly basis. Martyn Carroll, Nick Thorpe and myself will guide you through the various stages of the magazine, from its inception at Live Publishing to working in a post-pandemic environment and we've also reached out to numerous other ex-staff members who have worked on the magazine during its 20-year lifespan.

I've been lucky to have been involved in **Retro Gamer** for over 18 years of its 20-year existence and it's amazing to mark the many changes it has gone through from the magazine it was when Martyn and his team first launched it, to what it is today. So sit back, grab your slippers and a cup of your favourite beverage and join us as we take a walk through the **Retro Gamer** archives.

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retro GAMER

THE LIVE PUBLISHING ERA

2004-2005

One issue, four at the most. That was the plan when Live Publishing launched **Retro Gamer** in early 2004. It was felt that a retro title might work, but there was no guarantee because there was no precedent. Highbury-Paragon's *games™* featured a regular retro section (which actually helped float the **RG** idea in the first place), but that was a multiformat mag focussing on new releases. Was there a market for a dedicated retro-gaming mag? The idea was to find out by producing a single issue. Distributors didn't particularly like the idea of one-offs, so four quarterly issues were promised. Yet during that first year we put out 11 issues and a 'best of' anthology. **RG** was more successful than anyone expected.

These circumstances hopefully atone for the quality of that first issue. As it was approached as a potential one-off, it was tricky to work out what the hell to include. Plus, in standard Live fashion, there was no time to do it and the budget was very nearly several pounds. But we got something out and it sold surprisingly well and the second issue followed six weeks later. Now I had a bit of a budget so I could pay for freelance contributions. One of these was from Shaun Bebbington, who would join as staff writer on issue four, by which point the mag was locked into a four-weekly schedule.

In summer 2004 we ran a stand at the first Classic Gaming Expo UK in London, which was about 50 times better than E3, and I got to meet loads of readers (plus some guy called Matthew Smith). There was a definite buzz around the mag and this was reflected in the rapidly growing subscriber numbers. I feel the magazine found its feet towards the end of that first year, with the quality and balance of content improving with each issue. The second year brought new challenges however. Subscriber numbers were steady but newsstand sales tailed off, regardless of what incentives we tried. And then Live started to run into financial trouble and bankruptcy loomed.

» Launch editor and now long-time contributor Martyn Carroll.

The end was messy, but in total Live published 18 issues of **Retro Gamer**, which was a damn sight better than the single issue that might have been. And of course, those issues did enough to secure the mag a home at Imagine Publishing, where it would soon continue under a new team.

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

» This early cover mock-up was designed by one of Live's old hands before Mat Mabe got his mitts on it.

» A smiling Matthew Smith, visiting the **RG** stand at the Classic Gaming Expo UK event in July 2004.

SPACE INVADERS
VIDEO COMPUTER SYSTEM™
GAME PROGRAM™
112 VIDEO GAMES
MOVING SHIELDS • ZIGZAGGING LASER BOMBS • FAST LASER BOMBS • INVISIBLE INVADERS
CX 2632

» The cover design was based on the Atari 2600 *Space Invaders* box art, with a 'distressed' effect.

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MASSIVE GAME GUIDES INSIDE!
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4 FREE GAMES!
WHERE ARE THEY NOW? Ex-YS writers tracked down and grilled!
BEST YS MOMENTS! The top ten moments from within the shed!
SNOUTY'S ABOUT! Phil 'Snouty' South reveals all the juicy bits!
PLUS! YS Tipshop, Program Pitstop, Pssst, Reviews & Previews!

» **RG** 9 came with a free 32-page tribute to *Your Sinclair* magazine.

» Shaun using his Commodore 128 to extract data from *The Mega-Tree* development disks that we won on eBay.

CONTRIBUTOR Q&A

SHAUN BEBBINGTON

RG'S ORIGINAL STAFF WRITER LOOKS BACK AT HIS TIME ON THE MAG

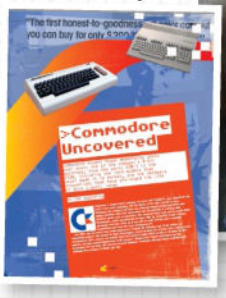
WHAT WAS IT LIKE WORKING ON RETRO GAMER AS A STAFF WRITER?

It was pretty good at the start, but things started to go downhill quickly as I was out of my depth. I wasn't a gamer. Not really. I was more interested in hardware, but people were still making software for the 8-bit computers that I grew up with, so I wanted to write about those new games. Although I was only there for nine months, and most people don't know that I contributed anything to **RG**, I had a small but significant influence on the magazine and I think retro gaming in general, in the sense that people now take new software for 8-bit machines more seriously.

WHICH OF YOUR FEATURES ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

The feature in issue two about Commodore computers. I was asked to write ten pages, more than I'd ever written before, and Martyn gave me a deadline of several weeks. This became two weeks as issue one had done really well and the intended quarterly publication was now going monthly. It became an all-waking-hours job, and some of the work had to be rewritten because I was using Microsoft Notepad on a Windows 98 machine and it couldn't save that many characters.

» Shaun contributed the Commodore history article that appeared in issue two of the mag.



» Staff writer from issue four through to 12, Shaun Bebbington.

DID THE MAGAZINE'S EARLY SUCCESS SURPRISE YOU?

Everyone was surprised at its success, and then everyone tried to claim **RG** as their baby. All I remember is how much work Martyn put into the mag. I know it was Martyn and Mat Mabe who had the vision.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON RG STILL BEING HERE, 20 YEARS ON?

It's pretty amazing, even to me, that there are print magazines in 2024, but I guess if you're a retro gamer, you still want a physical periodical that informs and delights. **Retro Gamer** must be doing some of that.

FAVOURITE FEATURES

The best received articles were those that covered Mastertronic (**RG** 1), *The Mega-Tree* (**RG** 5), Konix Multisystem (**RG** 8), Nintendo Game & Watch (**RG** 10) and *Skool Daze* (**RG** 17). The Construct Your Own Coin-op guide in **RG** 6 was also surprisingly popular, and seemed to inspire quite a few readers to dig out their toolboxes and disappear into their sheds. Personally my favourite features were Paul Drury's Desert Islands Disks. For me his very human, very funny stories were - and still are - the highlight of each issue. – Martyn Carroll

THE COVERDISCS

Most of Live's titles featured coverdiscs, to make them appear more 'premium' on the newsstand, and **Retro Gamer** wasn't able to escape that fate. The initial idea was to just fill 'em with freeware – PC arcade clones and emulators – but we exhausted that idea after about two issues. So we looked to secure back catalogues from publishers and managed to bend some arms, resulting in the Gremlin, Graftgold, Durell and Llamasoft discs. It was a hassle though, and not particularly worth it as the general feedback was, "I can just download those games for free, mate." One highlight was issue four's C64 audio CD, which Chris Abbott provided.

OLD BUT NEW

Mat Mabe was the art editor during **Retro Gamer**'s first year and he shaped the look of those early issues. The only inspiration I gave him were a few DIY retro fanzines and that's where the cut and paste-style layout came from. He was also inspired by old gaming mags and would purposely choose fonts and colour combinations that were difficult to read. This would usually escape management's notice but I do remember him getting dressed down for using "too much brown". The fake scuffing on the first two issues' covers, that resulted in some newsagents returning them as damaged stock, didn't go down too well either. – Martyn Carroll

GAME OVER

When the receivers arrived at Live on 22 August 2005, I'd love to say it was similar to what happened at Imagine Software, with employees hiding in toilet stalls, balancing PCs on their knees. But no, I just burned a CD containing all the stuff I was working on, grabbed my desk cactus and left. It was a relief in some ways, as the final few weeks had been rough, but at the same time I was saddened by the circumstances. **Retro Gamer** was still a profitable title with a lot of goodwill, but its stablemates were mostly PC mags that couldn't compete with the internet. It's telling that of all the mags that were put up for sale, only **RG** found a buyer. A few weeks later I found myself at home writing a Spectrum feature for the *new* issue 19 – with the cactus on my desk and a smile on my face. – Martyn Carroll

retro GAMER

THE IMAGINE PUBLISHING ERA

2005-2009

Although it was 19 years ago, I can still remember the first day I started working on Retro Gamer like it was yesterday. It was a mixture of excitement and trepidation – excitement because it was the chance to take a popular magazine and apply my own spin to it, trepidation because I'd never run a magazine before.

We had roughly two weeks to get that first issue out before Christmas 2005 and it was a tricky one, requiring lots of extremely late nights and plenty of support. Mark Kendrick, Imagine's creative director, redesigned the magazine and we would spend a lot of time talking about what it was like for him working on the Newsfield mags, which certainly made that tight deadline a lot less stressful.

There were obviously lots of discussions about what the magazine would and wouldn't be, what was actually considered retro and whether we'd keep making the coverdiscs. That first issue saw everyone getting involved, from Damian Butt, Imagine's managing director, to Simon Phillips, who had mentored me when I was on *games™* and was now overseeing Imagine's videogame department. There was a real sense that everyone wanted **Retro Gamer** to succeed.

The support from readers was incredible during this period – they quickly found the forum before we officially launched it and had nothing but kind things to say at the early events I attended. Issue 19 certainly wasn't perfect – there are some editorial howlers in there due to the lack of time and a full-time production editor – but it was wonderful seeing it on shelves again. It was particularly nice getting the late Archer Maclean as a columnist, as I loved playing his games as a youngster.

Some readers weren't happy with the magazine shining a bigger spotlight on games and consoles in those early years, as the Live Publishing era had focussed more on hardware and home computers, but the change made perfect sense to everyone at Imagine – the magazine is called **Retro Gamer** after all.

Those early years on **RG** were a fusion of fun and frustration as I got to grips with managing both a magazine and a team for the first time. Sarah Bellman joined as senior designer from **RG** 21, while John Szczepaniak's tenure as the mag's staff writer started on **RG** 29. We managed to secure plenty of writers from the Live Publishing era of the mag, many of whom still write for **RG** today. We also had a range of great production editors working behind the scenes, including Luke Smith, Amy Squibb, Jon White and Daniel Peel – we even had Phil King from the legendary Newsfield magazines subbing for us at one point. Cover meetings could be incredibly challenging at times and the hours could be long (particularly on deadlines, when finishing work past midnight wasn't unusual), but I was doing my dream job and found the pros would always outweigh the cons.

New team members joined, with Stuart Hunt taking over from John from **RG** 42 and Stephen Williams replacing Sarah from **RG** 49. I made a joke in a cover meeting once saying that I'd be surprised if the magazine lasted for more than 35 issues because we'd run out of things to write about. I'm delighted to have been proven wrong.

WORDS BY DARRAN JONES

» **RG** 21 was the first issue Sarah Bellman worked on. Weirdly, despite her great work on the magazine, she never liked working with sprites.

» An Imagine tradition was to have the first issue of a new magazine signed when it came back from the printers.

» Darran was covering CGE 05 for *games™*'s retro section to interview Walter Day (left) and Billy Mitchell. While there, he chatted to Martyn Carroll about **Retro Gamer**'s lack of presence, without realising he'd be overseeing the relaunched magazine a few months later.

COMPILATION COOL

MORE RETRO HITS FROM EA

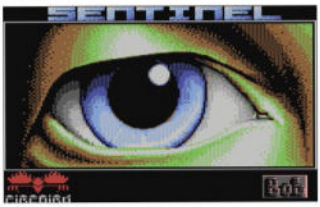
AT LAST!

It's been available in the US for absolutely ages now, but Electronic Arts has finally revealed that it will be bringing *Namco's Arcade 50th Anniversary* compilation will finally be appearing in the UK. Due on 10 February, it will include *Pac-Man, Galaga, Galaxian, Dig-Dug, Rolling Thunder* and several other classics. Systems supported will include the Game boy Advance, GameCube, PlayStation and Xbox.

LOADING SCREEN OF THE MONTH

NO.1: THE SENTINEL

Geoff Crammond's *The Sentinel* is still deemed by many as one of the greatest strategy games ever created. Not content with its suitably eerie box art, Firebird also ensured that Bob Stevenson's loading screen perfectly captured the abstract uniqueness of the game itself.



» Loading Screen Of The Month was a nice idea but in hindsight we should have given it more space so the art could really shine.

» We don't recommend making a magazine in two weeks. Otherwise stuff like this happens…

A TRIBUTE TO OLIVER FREY

Mark Kendrick had worked at Newsfield and both he and Damian wanted Oliver's art for certain issues of the magazine. We rarely commissioned new pieces, instead asking him to adapt classics covers like **RG** 142's shmup special (the last cover he did for us). We like to think Oliver's fantastic art helped convince readers to pick up the magazine in those early years and it's great to see them still being used on the modern versions of *Crash* and *Zzap!64*.

» We eventually started adding the *Crash*-style corner strap to our covers to make Oliver's art more nostalgic.

THE STAMPER BROTHERS

One of Darran's proudest moments was interviewing Chris Stamper for the Spectrum Legends feature in **RG** 29. After repeatedly contacting them at Rare, he received a lovely reply saying that while they appreciated the interest, they liked to look forward rather than back. A compromise was reached where Darran wouldn't contact them for six months if they agreed to answer three questions, which Chris agreed to. The Stampers left Rare shortly afterwards and Darran hasn't been able to get hold of them since (not through lack of trying).

COVER MEETINGS

Tuesday was the day we had cover meetings and they were easily the most stressful aspect of working on **Retro Gamer**. The cover is clearly the most important aspect of the magazine as you're using it to sell the mag. As a result of that, anything you did came under intense scrutiny because it needed to be as good as possible. We'd always take in four options at the beginning of a new issue and would typically have to work on two or three options at a time until we were left with the best option (sometimes till the very last week). The upside was that we had the best possible cover to entice potential readers with; the downside was that we ended up with a lot of wasted covers. Fortunately, we've been able to revisit several of those lost covers, so not all of them went to waste after all.

» Darran would love to take full credit for this amazing title hit, but it was most likely the work of the brilliant Simon Phillips.

SLEEPY TIME

We'd often put long hours into **Retro Gamer** and it was inevitable that it would take a toll on us. Darran would often play shmups in his lunchtime and rather than rotate the huge CRT TV to play Tate games, he'd simply lay on the couch and play them that way instead. That inevitably led to him falling asleep in the breakout area of the office, only to be woken up by a manager. Whoops!

CONTRIBUTOR Q&A

JOHN SZCZEPANIAK

ON THE EARLY DAYS AT IMAGINE

» John's extremely proud of his Dale DeSharone interview.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE BEING PART OF THE RETRO GAMER REVIVAL?

Bittersweet. I'd lost money when Live Publishing folded. Once I was staff I realised that in-house writers mainly handle the back-end bits, while freelancers do the cool features. Myself and freelancer Ashley Day joined Imagine Publishing at the same time and flat-shared; he'd always hide the trash bags!

WHAT FEATURE ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

In The Chair With Dale DeSharone from **RG** 31. He had a long career in games, making classics like *Below The Root* on the C64. Later he developed *Faces Of Evil* and *Wand Of Gamelon* for CDi – people criticise them, but I love those *Zelda* games. No one had ever thought to ask him how they were made. It doesn't matter what you think of them, their creation is a fascinating story! Shortly afterwards he passed away.

I made it my goal to champion his legacy, which ultimately led to a fan remake and now *Arzette*. I contacted his wife and donated my audio recordings and emails – he'd spoken warmly of his family and I wanted them to have his words. His son personally thanked me. Dale, may you rest in peace – I tried my best.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE ANECDOTE FROM YOUR TIME ON THE MAG?

Darran was away so I decided to come in stoned and do very little work. As a result the *Shinobi III* column in **RG** 33 was written whilst utterly baked! I also have fond memories of attending a PR party and Big Boy Barry from *GamesMaster*, who did PR, bought us all unlimited drinks. Hanging out with Stefan McGarry from Sega was also fun.

WHAT WAS YOUR FAVOURITE COVER?

I'm going to cheat with freelancing covers – since my articles were the covers! *Metal Slug* from **RG** 98, and *Pilotwings* from **RG** 229. During my tenure in-house, Falcoon from SNK painted us a special cover, but management sadly rejected it.

FAVOURITE COVERS

We did some belters during those early days on the mag. Wil Overton's Ultimate cover for **RG** 22 was immense, while we love the reuse of Oliver Frey's *Crash* art for **RG** 34. Darran's also proud of the *Gauntlet* cover he created for **RG** 56.

"'Duke Nukem' rhymed and nuking things sound cool. That's as deep as character design got in those days"

GEORGE BROUSSARD ON HOW THE DUKE GOT HIS NAME (RG 39)

VISITING RARE

Darran, Stuart and Nick are big fans of Rare and all got to visit the studio on a few occasions. Darran first visited Rare for **RG** 39 to discuss *Jetpac Refuelled* and it remains one of his favourite studio visits. Although the Stampers were no longer at Rare, Darran was presented with a signed *Jetpac Refuelled* picture, a Horstachio piñata and a *Viva Piñata* faceplate which more than made up for it.

» Horstachio has certainly seen better days but Darran will never get rid of him.

CVGIDDY

CVG was Stuart's favourite magazine to read growing up. At one stage he even tried convincing Darran that it would be a good idea to include a yellow-papered insert in **RG** dedicated to arcade machines, as *CVG* had done for a time. Because of this, getting Paul Davies (its former editor) to join the team as a columnist was all sorts of amazing for Stuart. For him, it was like working with his hero.

» He didn't get his yellow pages, but Stuart did get Paul Davies to write regularly for the magazine

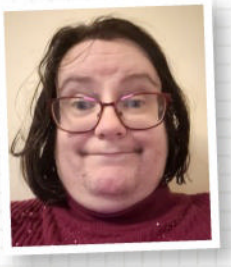
"The nap room wasn't being cleaned at all. One morning staff woke us up and told us that the room smelled like a zoo"

YOSHIO SAKAMOTO ON LATE NIGHTS WORKING ON *SUPER METROID* (RG 65)

COMMUNITY SPIRIT

We've always been proud of our relationship with readers. They're the lifeblood of any magazine and we've always tried to include them in each issue. Let's All Play used to be incredibly popular when the forum was in its prime, while having readers vote for the Top 25s meant the final choices were bulletproof. We still get a kick when readers share their collections, while your letters continue to mean a great deal to us.

» Let's All Play saw forum members get together to play classic games. It was a nice community aspect of the mag and an easy four pages to make.



CONTRIBUTOR Q&A
KIM WILD
ON WRITING FOR LIVE PUBLISHING AND BEYOND

HOW DID YOU START WRITING FOR RETRO GAMER, KIM?

I was a freelancer writing PlayStation guides for Live Publishing when **Retro Gamer** was launched with Martyn Carroll at the helm. I pitched a few ideas and wrote the article interviewing David Crane about *Little Computer People* and went on from there. When Darran Jones took over the magazine after Live Publishing went under, he approached me to become a freelancer which I gladly accepted. I haven't written professionally for about seven years due to changing health circumstances but I still read every issue of the magazine and I'm glad I got to be a part of it for so many years.

WHAT'S IT LIKE TRACKING DOWN DEVELOPERS TO INTERVIEW?

It can be a bit challenging trying to find the right people, especially if they aren't still in the videogame industry or have any online presence. When you do though it's great finding out about them and their inspirations for creating games and they usually have a fascinating tale or two to tell.

WHAT ASPECTS OF WRITING ABOUT RETRO GAMES ARE CHALLENGING?

Making sure that the information is accurate and not randomly sourced. Some creators can be reluctant to give detailed quotes on the first try and of course there can be very tight deadlines! The technical side of taking screenshots and writing captions for the emulated games can also be more tricky and time-consuming than expected.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE ARTICLE?

I have a lot of favourites but a real labour of love was the two-part Developer Lookback series on LucasArts (**RG** 27 and **RG** 28). I had played all their games, particularly their point-and-click adventures, repeatedly all my life so getting to interview so many people involved with their creation was so amazing. I guess you could say it inspired the fangirl in me!

CRASH AND ZZAP!64: PUSH AND PULL

Working at pace, errors would occasionally find their way into the magazine, and it was always gutting if they slipped through into print. There was one that Stuart would make at least once every few months: getting the names of *Crash* and *Zzap!64* magazines mixed up. It was comical, to the extent that, for him, it became the writing equivalent of pushing against a door that clearly states you need to pull its handle.

» Confusing these two – an easy mistake to make? It certainly seemed to be one Stuart had fallen into repeating.

retro GAMER

THE IMAGINE PUBLISHING ERA

2010-2014

We were five years into the mag's life at Imagine by this point and it was obvious we weren't going anywhere. Sales and subscriptions were extremely healthy and while the market for magazines was becoming trickier, we were weathering the storm well.

» Darran loves Strider, so he was over the moon when John Szczepaniak sorted out an interview with Kouichi Yotsui in RG 76.

We were fresh off a redesign and did some really creative covers in 2010. **RG** 76 had a cover supporting Microsoft's incoming *Game Room* (apparently the first time a digital Xbox 360 game had appeared on a games cover), we did an awesome *Mario* advent calendar to celebrate the plumber's 25th anniversary for **RG** 82 and a follow-up *Donkey Kong* cover for **RG** 83 that was infamously referred to by Ryan King as 'the Goatse cover' (don't Google it). Another cool cover we did was make **RG** 81's *Laser Squad* cover look like a game box (I think that was Damian's suggestion). We finished off 2010 with a win at the Games Media Awards, which was delightful. Part of **RG**'s success during this period was definitely thanks to the talented production editors behind the scenes, which included Matt Hoddy, Olly Williams and Rebecca Richards. If you've ever read any of Darran's Twitter posts, you'll be well aware of the Herculean task they had on their hands.

During 2011 we said goodbye to designer Stephen Williams and said hello to Katie Stevenson (then Logsdon), who started on **RG** 90. While she recently shared with us that her only previous videogame experience had been playing *Crash Bandicoot* and *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* on her brother's PlayStation, you'd never guess it from looking at her work. Katie would stay with us until issue 100 and it would be several more months before we got a permanent replacement for her, with Jonathan 'Jonny' Wells eventually arriving for **RG** 109 (a big thanks to Will Shum for keeping **RG** ticking over in the meantime).

This era was also when we lost Stuart Hunt, whose last issue was **RG** 123. Stuart did some sensational work during his six years on the magazine and we had a lot of fun discussing the Amstrad and Master System when we weren't having high-score competitions with Ste and Jonny. Fortunately, those Master System conversations would continue when Nick Thorpe joined me for **RG** 124.

Another change was that we were using this period to 'feel out' newer options for the covers. If you look back at Imagine's first five years we played it pretty safe with covers, but this period saw us experimenting with GameCube and Dreamcast games like *Crazy Taxi*, the Neo Geo, Sega's Saturn and even an image of Electronic Arts' Trip Hawkins. They didn't always work out but it's always nice to try something new, and I think you have to do that if you want your magazine to have a long shelf life.

WORDS BY DARRAN JONES

» Ste Williams did such an amazing job on **RG** 85's *Secret Of Mana* cover that other designers kept nicking our spare issues so we had none to send to developers.

» Interviews with Japanese developers are always tough, but supportive publishers like Sega, Nintendo and Capcom helped make them easier.

The Making Of ...
The Revenge of SHINOBI
Following a run of disappointing arcade tie-ins, The Revenge Of Shinobi marked the start of great things from the Mega Drive. Stuart Hunt speaks to its director, Noriyoshi Ohba, to discover more about this significant Sega release
"It was a far more personal mission for Joe, purposely thought up to evoke a more epic feel for the sequel"
UNFIT NINJA

» It was a real honour when John Romero agreed to guest edit **RG** 75 for us. The cover was cracking too.

» The idea for this cover was fine, but it never really worked the way we wanted. It sold okay, mind.

OLD!
retro GAMER
THE HARDEST GAMES OF ALL TIME
WHO NEEDS GTA?
MIDNIGHT RESISTANCE
THE LIFE, DEATH AND LEGACY OF
MAZE GAMES
• GAUNTLET • LADYBUG • MAZE WAR • PENGO • TROG • RALLY-X • BERZERK • BOMBERMAN • TURTLES • MOUSETRAP • OH, AND PAC-MAN
ALSO INSIDE!
RETURN TO HEARTLAND
25 YEARS OF ATARI LYNX

OLD!
retro GAMER
EXTRA! EXTRA!
SOMETHING SINISTAR!
ALSO INSIDE!
PAPERBOY DELIVERS FOR 30 YEARS!
READ ALL ABOUT IT! THE BIG SCOOP ON ATARI'S ARCADE CLASSIC
BLAHBLA BLAH BL...
MISSING TOEJAM & EARL GAME FOUND!
10 MOVIE LICENCES!
THIS IS THE PARADROID YOU'RE LOOKING FOR!
PUTTY SQUAD FINALLY HERE!

» Some covers effortlessly skipped through the cover meeting gauntlet, with **RG** 125's *Paperboy* being a notable example. A great idea and a great execution.

» One of Stuart's favourite memories is of spending an afternoon playing various board games based on classic videogames for 'work'.

THE GMAS WIN

One of our biggest achievements in those early years was winning Best Magazine at the Games Media Awards. We were expecting it to go to *Edge* or *PC Zone* because the latter had recently been shuttered, so the win totally blindsided us. It really felt like **Retro Gamer** was being acknowledged by both our peers and the press at large as a proper magazine and we ended up getting very merry indeed.

» Magazine awards were always kept in reception for visitors to admire. It now sits proudly on Darran's bookshelf.

LOST COVERS

Four cover options every month meant many options were never used. Some ideas have been revisited in recent years (the *Earthworm Jim* subs cover for **RG** 230 and the *Turtles* cover for **RG** 241 for example), but many have been lost forever. For a brief period, we did share them in the Mailbag section of the mag. Some were good enough for release, while others weren't. Here are a couple of our favourites that didn't make the cut..

» One day we'll resurrect the Kirby and Activision covers…

ISSUE 100

We wanted to do something special for issue 100 and Damian suggested reprinting the first issue, which was a great idea. We put together all sorts of cool features, including a look at *Grand Theft Auto* and The Making Of *Sonic The Hedgehog*, leaving just the cover to sort. When it was suggested we were simply copying a classic cover by The Beatles, Darran replied with, "If it's good enough for The Beatles, it's good enough for us."

» The idea was to match the original cover as closely as possible. We didn't do too badly in the end.

WIPE OUT

Darran and technology don't mix. While we were working on **RG** 97, he accidentally deleted the **Retro Gamer** server, losing quite a few days' work in the process. Luckily, our production editors came to the rescue as they had all of Kate's designed work saved and already proofed, so the only person who lost precious time and had to re-proof pages was the idiot who had deleted everything.

CONTRIBUTOR Q&A

KATIE STEVENSON

REVISITS THE MAG

WE RECALL YOU HAVING TWO DIFFICULT COVERS WHEN YOU FIRST STARTED...

My first cover was a triple embossed, gold-foil *Zelda* cover, which was a real baptism of fire! I'd never set up that kind of artwork before, I was so nervous I'd mess it up! That was swiftly followed by the foil gatefold *Sonic* cover which was a challenge too but was really fun to design. Both turned out well, and over a decade later they still remain some of my favourite pieces of work.

WHAT WAS YOUR FAVOURITE ASPECT OF WORKING ON THE MAGAZINE?

Despite not being a gamer, I really enjoyed diving into the weird and wonderful worlds of the games and bringing them to life on the page. **RG** was fun to produce as it involved so much bespoke design, which allowed me to be really creative.

AND WHAT DID YOU FIND CHALLENGING?

The deadlines!

DO YOU HAVE A RETRO GAMER ANECDOTE TO SHARE?

Whilst working on **RG**, I was nominated for the much-coveted Designer Of The Year award. I was thrilled and honoured to be nominated, as the company was teeming with brilliant and much more experienced designers. Anyway, it was the Christmas party and it's fair to say I was pretty trashed and the time had come to announce the award… They read out my name and I instantly jumped up, ready to go claim my award, when I realised, to my horror, that my colleagues were crying with laughter and were hastily trying to pull me back down into my seat! My name was the first on the list of nominees and I'd stood up before they'd even read the rest of the list! I was mortified and wanted to crawl under the table… They carried on reading out the other nominees and to my delight and relief announced that I had, indeed won the award. I never lived it down though and it remains one of the most cringeworthy moments of my life!

FAVOURITE FEATURES

Highlights from this era of the mag include Martyn Carroll's *Ultimate* cover feature from **RG** 109, an all-access piece with Trip Hawkins about the 3DO in **RG** 122 and Rory Milne's superb Electronic Dreams article from **RG** 106.

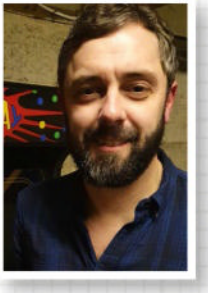
"It wasn't that they rarely gave interviews – they never did. Except to us"

THE LATE ROGER KEAN ON EXCLUSIVE ACCESS TO THE STAMPERS (RG 109)

CONTRIBUTOR Q&A

STUART HUNT

REVISITS HIS TIME ON RETRO GAMER



WHAT WAS IT LIKE WORKING ON RETRO GAMER?

It was a great experience and a job that I loved. From starting out as a staff writer, finding my feet and trying to hone my writing at pace, to ending my time as a features editor six years later. Darran was a great editor, always supportive of new ideas and trying out new things, and we had similar ambitions for the magazine. We wanted **RG** to feel like the gaming mags we loved reading growing up, filling each issue with variety, passion and character. We were fortunate enough to have a pool of amazing freelance writers that made this job easier.

WHAT CHALLENGES DID YOU FACE?

There was a lot of pressure each month to deliver an issue that covered the different tastes of our readership. The first few days of a new issue hitting stands and doormats was always a bit tense, as we waited to hear people's reactions. The other challenge was making sure we did right by interviewees. They were entrusting us with the stories behind their games, and often interviews had to be conducted over email. This was never my preference as you always got greater insight over a good chat.

WHAT FEATURES ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

I grew up with an Amstrad CPC 464, so chatting with Gary Bracey, over sausage and mash, to write a big retrospective piece on the history of Ocean Software was a great experience. Visiting Rare's studios for a similar piece was memorable too. Tracking down a programmer to write about a game of theirs that I loved playing as a kid, those also meant a lot. Speaking to Stephen Crow about *Starquake*, for example, or Colin Jones for a Making Of *Rock Star Ate My Hamster*.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE ANECDOTE ABOUT WORKING ON THE MAG?

The first is Darran and I getting drawn by Oli Frey for two Christmas covers (**RG** 58 and **RG** 84). **Retro Gamer** being crowned Best Magazine at the 2010 Games Media Awards was also very special. It took us by complete surprise, and was a great achievement for the magazine.

SUBWAY CELEB SPOTTING

Darran and Stuart would often grab lunch together, and a regular haunt was the Subway on Bournemouth High Street. On this particular day they were amazed to see Howard from Take That stood in front of them in the queue. They got a teensy bit starstruck, debated loudly the likelihood of it actually being him (he could quite clearly hear this), and then avoided making eye contact with the man as he shuffled past with his sandwich.

"With arcade games, our bosses wanted us to make people spend 100 yen coins every three minutes"

YOSHISHIA KISHIMOTO ON WHY GAMES LIKE RENEGADE WERE SO HARD (RG 108)

NEVER STOP GRINDING

Everyone was worried about Darran when he was hospitalised while making issue 127, but Darran was a bit too worried about the magazine. Trying to make sure everything went smoothly, he sent us an unprompted review of *OlliOlli* via text message from his hospital bed – an act that earned the team a stern telling-off from our head of HR, who told us to leave him alone while he was recovering!

x3 Backside 360 Shove-It
OlliOlli
» System: PS Vita
» Buy it for: £7.99
» Buy it from: PSN
You don't need to enjoy skateboarding to appreciate the addictive qualities of OlliOlli. Effectively a cross between an endless runner and a Tony Hawk's game, the aim is to negotiate 2D landscapes while completing a number of tasks that range from achieving a set number of points during combos to pulling off specific tricks. The difficulty curve feels off on certain stages, but this is an otherwise challenging score attack game and another Vita gem.
88%

» Who would have thought such a cool game could cause so much trouble.

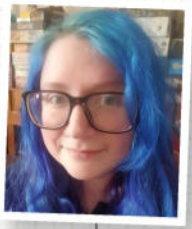
FAVOURITE COVERS

Some of the best covers from this period were Jonny Wells' stunning take on *SimCity* for **RG** 115, a gorgeous Ultimate cover for **RG** 109 and **RG** 86's Isometric Evolution cover.

CONTRIBUTOR Q&A

REBECCA RICHARDS

ON SUBBING RETRO GAMER



WHAT WAS IT LIKE WORKING ON RETRO GAMER?

Unlike some of the other magazines I worked on, there was a consistently engaged and always-growing community of retro fans, some of whom would directly contribute to the magazine. So despite being a commercial product, it never really felt like one; we were always able to publish much more freely based on what we were interested in because almost none of it was based on any kind of external schedule like industry events or new releases.

HOW DID RETRO GAMER COMPARE TO OTHER MAGS YOU PROOFED?

Considerably lengthier! In terms of pure content density and word count, **RG** has always been a titan. Other magazines would have features usually running between four and eight pages, while **RG** could easily go up to 16, 18, 20 pages… Still, deep-diving into proofreading and fact-checking for a **Retro Gamer** article was always a fun time; even for games I was familiar with, there was always new information to read about.

WHAT WAS YOUR FAVOURITE TYPE OF ARTICLE TO READ?

I think probably Making Ofs for their unique perspectives. The amount of passion that developers have for their work and the insight they have from behind the scenes, no matter how many years later, is always an interesting read. There is a timelessness to a **Retro Gamer** issue – I can pick up any issue of **RG** even now, years later, and enjoy reading it through pretty much cover to cover.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE ANECDOTE FROM BEING ON THE MAG?

What comes to mind is the internal debate with **RG** 137 with the decision of whether or not to put the original PlayStation on the cover. I remember it feeling wild to me; "retro games" were games from my dad's childhood, not mine! It was definitely the right call; there are still so many people who want to keep reading about and engaging with their favourite games, tech and consoles, even as the mainstream moves on. It's no bad thing to bring more enthusiasts into the retro-gaming world.

retro GAMER

INTO THE FUTURE

2015-2019

We opened 2015 with a brand-new addition to the team, production editor Drew Sleep, and spent much of the year trying some new things with our covers – the NES cartridge design of **RG** 139, Gaming's Greatest Disasters in **RG** 141 and the Japanese text of *Space Harrier* for **RG** 145 all spring to mind. **RG** 150 capped off the year, an arduous issue in which we tried to 'go big' with an enormous cover feature and big names to back it up.

RG 155 brought two new faces to the team, with *Croc* enthusiast Sam Ribbits taking over as designer. Luke Albigés also joined us as associate editor for seven issues, as the result of a tumultuous period in which both his former mags, *Play* and *X-One*, were closed within months of one another. Another big shock was in store just weeks later when we learned that Imagine Publishing was to be bought by Future – something that we found out on social media before work, and I personally found out during a week off.

We were trepidatious about the deal, and we weren't the only ones – I'll never forget some of the worried comments from readers when the deal was approved, lamenting the past losses of mags like *PC Zone*. To be frank, we felt that **Retro Gamer** was probably safe in the short term since Future didn't have a direct equivalent, but we didn't know what our new working relationships would be like. What's more, Future had been struggling financially only a couple of years prior, resulting in the closure of *CVG* and all the layoffs that came with that.

Thankfully, Future's business was at the beginning of a major turnaround, and it quickly became apparent that our new colleagues cared about **Retro Gamer** just as much as we did. While circumstances meant that our brief but entertaining foray into YouTube became impractical to continue, the majority of changes were very positive – particularly the freedom to give one cover idea our full attention from the start, which resulted in fewer last-minute changes and less stress. Better yet, we got to do much more in the way of extra gifts, from *Super Play* issue 48 to sticker sheets and even music CDs.

The result was that **Retro Gamer** not only survived but thrived, and at the end of 2018 we actually won the Magazine Of The Year award at Future's annual conference (see the image below). Sam moved on to pastures new soon after, with our current group art director Woz Brown taking the reins briefly from **RG** 192. Art Editor Andy Salter joined the crew in **RG** 196, giving him the task of laying out **RG** 200 – a ridiculously ambitious issue that we worked on until 2:30am, with poor Drew declaring, "My surname is ironic."

RG 201's cover featured the newly announced Analogue Pocket, a testament to the ever-changing nature of retro gaming. Little did we know that by the time the console finally arrived in 2021, the process of making **Retro Gamer** would have gone through drastic changes too.

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

» We'd often get into odd-looking situations when trying new things – Jonny and Darran are working on Gaming's Greatest Disasters here.

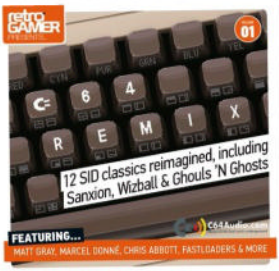
OLD!
retro GAMER
THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES
DRILLER THRILLER
SYSTEM 3
GAMING'S BIGGEST DISASTERS
DEVELOPERS DISCUSS THE CONSOLES, PERIPHERALS AND GAMES THAT CRASHED AND BURNED DESPITE THEIR HYPE
CREATING CENTIPEDE
"I LOVE THE POWER GLOVE. IT'S SO BAD"
SUPER OFF ROAD
PERFECTING PARASOL STARS
BRIAN FARGO: THE RPG KING

» As you can see, we went with a different photographic composition for the cover in the end.

OLD!
retro GAMER
THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES
HOW TO PLAY RETRO TODAY
PLUS
"He wanted to outrun Out Run!"
CHASE H.Q.
DEVELOPERS REVEAL HOW TAITO'S SHUNT-'EM-UP RAMMED THE COMPETITION OFF THE ROAD
THE HISTORY OF WARCRAFT
THE LEGACY OF METROID
INSIDE THIS TURBO-CHARGED ISSUE

» The first cover bearing the Future logo was a solid choice that sold better than we all expected.

01 LIGHTFORCE MARCEL DONNÉ
02 THE LAST V8 FABIAN DEL PRIORE & MARCEL DONNÉ
03 THALAMUSIK – SANXION LOADING THEME MATT GRAY
04 GHOULS 'N GHOSTS FASTLOADERS
05 WIZBALL 2000 (LARA AND ENYA MIX) TONIKA
06 FLASH GORDON CHRIS ABBOTT & ALISTAIR 'BOZ' BONNESS
07 HYPERION 2 – MAIN THEME MATT GRAY
08 MEGA APOCALYPSE MATT GRAY
09 MUTANTS REYN OOSTVEEN
10 PHANTOMS OF THE ASTEROID MATT GRAY
11 GALWAY IS GOD 2000 (CD MIX) RICHARD JOSEPH
12 WIZBALL (HIGH SCORE) ROB HUBBARD FEAT. KING



» Getting to put a music CD on the cover was a particular highlight of our early days with Future.

» **Retro Gamer** team members past and present gathered to celebrate reaching issue 200 in 2019.

OLD!
retro GAMER
THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES
A WHOLE NEW WORLD
PAC-MAN
TOD FRYE ON HIS ATARI 2600 BESTSELLER AND BECOMING AN OVERNIGHT MILLIONAIRE
PLUS!
OUR PAC-MAN DOUBLE BILL CONTINUES WITH THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO PAC-MANIA
BBC MICRO: KING OF THE CLONES
MOONSTONE: A HARD DAYS KNIGHT
AHOY THERE! IT'S GREGG MAYLES

DUNGEON DWELLER

"I loved everything about working on **Retro Gamer**. I got to do and explore a lot of things during my time on it that helped develop me as a designer... but I never imagined dragging Nick down to a basement for a Dungeons & Dragons photoshoot dressed in black cape, complete with board games, figures and consoles, pulling out his best dungeon master poses as one of my highlights! It still makes me laugh whenever I see it." – Jonathan Wells

» Jonny was fond of getting us to do fun photoshoots; check out Duck Hunt Darran in **RG** 135.

SPECTRUM SPECTATORS

In September 2015, *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* was the hot new game in the office, so naturally, a crowd gathered around a TV in the games department must have been watching that, right? Not a chance. The ZX Spectrum Vega had also just arrived, and the gathered observers were actually mesmerised by a demonstration of Darran's skills on *Nifty Lifty*.

» If you're wondering about the lens flare, JJ Abrams was guest director in the office that day.

POST FOR YOU THANKS

"We used to be allowed to send orders to our office address, thanks to the kindness of our long-suffering receptionists. Daz used to enjoy getting post, and he'd often go on spending sprees based on whatever retro obsession he had. He'd often come jogging back from the post room with a terrific horde of retro goodness bursting from his arms and the smile of a kid on Christmas day. We'd all then gather around and watch him open his parcels – ooh-ing and ahh-ing at his purchases." – Drew Sleep

» Darran lording it over his latest stack of US GameCube games, to the right.

THE BOOK OF JIBJOB

Named after Darran's favourite substitute for nouns he can't remember, this tome contains quotes from everyday work life. Printable highlights include Drew admonishing Darran, "All I've been getting from you today is sausage, sausage, sausage, it's been relentless" and Andy describing Luigi as, "Basically the Milhouse of the Mario brothers." The best? Darran, in full 'ghost' voice, telling an accident claim telemarketer, "I am the ghost of the person who died, please don't call me… I will haunt you… Oooooo…"

CONTRIBUTOR Q&A

DREW SLEEP

SHARES HIS MEMORIES

IT'S BEEN A FEW YEARS – HOW DO YOU LOOK BACK ON YOUR TIME WITH RETRO GAMER?

Working on **Retro Gamer** was the best gig I ever had and ever will have. The halcyon days of having endless amounts of fun with Darran, Nick and Andy, and our former designers Jonny Wells, Sam Ribbits and Woz Brown were some of my favourite days.

Retro Gamer is one-of-a-kind, and that's all down to its team. It's Darran's laser-focussed drive to obtain behind-the-scenes access in the form of candid interviews, Nick's best-in-class technical nous, Andy's amazing design work and Tim's perfect eye for detail. I'm not forgetting the freelancers too: Paul Drury, Martyn Carroll, Graeme Mason, Rory Milne and so many more besides, are the beating heart of **Retro Gamer**: here's to you, guys.

YOU MENTION FUN...

I'm honestly surprised that Nick and I are still working at Future after the psychological torture we submitted Darran to on a daily basis. A special mention goes to **RG**'s former designer (and Gobbo King) Sam Ribbits for being the most dastardly of the trio that probably gives Daz nightmares to this day.

It's infamous that Darran isn't a fan of *Dig Dug*, and we exploited this by hiding mentions of it within **Retro Gamer**'s pages. But as my time working on **Retro Gamer** was drawing to an end, I inserted one final Trojan Horse: just pop the numbers on the Desert Island Disks passport into an ASCII-to-text converter. It's been there since at least issue 212, probably longer!

IT CAN'T HAVE ALL BEEN FUN AND GAMES, THOUGH?

I think anyone who has worked in print media has done a late shift getting an issue out of the door, and it all gets a bit weird after hours. One night I'd gone to make a coffee and shuffled back to find Darran, usually a tall and assured presence, crumpled at his desk.

"Daz..." I said, concerned, "You all right, mate?"

He unfolded, looked at me and pointed at a highlighted word on his computer screen. I can't remember what it was, but the important part is that the word was spelt correctly and was in exactly the right place.

"Is this a word?" Darran squeaked, defeated. "I don't know any more..."

FAVOURITE FEATURES

Ian Dransfield's retrospective on the creation of the disastrous *Trespasser* in **RG** 188, David Crookes' interview with Mark Cerny in **RG** 168 and Luke Albigés examining the speedrunning community in **RG** 155 were highlights of this era.

"The only person on the team that was still happy was Phil, the animator, who spent all day animating Lara being slaughtered in new novel traps and enemy attacks"

ANDY SANDHAM ON CORE DESIGN'S *TOMB RAIDER* BURNOUT (RG 163)

UNCOOPERATIVE MODELS

When we went up to Arcade Club in 2018, we had to get photographs of various cabinets before it opened one morning. This was easier said than done – each of them had to be moved by staff, and our photographer James Sheppard was often forced into trying to light the scene in very cramped conditions. We ended up massively overrunning too, giving us the added complication of customers that we couldn't impede. The kicker? The Arcade Perfect series only ran for five issues.

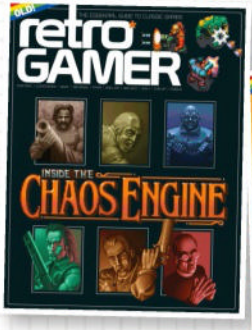
» Arcade Club is an awesome day out, but it's not an ideal environment for photography.

A NEW EDITOR?

Back in 2016, it looked as though Darran might have been leaving us, as Imagine Publishing was planning to launch a new retro-themed magazine. The plan was that he would oversee the new retro department as editor in chief, while Luke Albigés would take over as the editor of **Retro Gamer**. However, these plans were scrapped as we became part of Future – the new monthly magazine and its accompanying department never materialised, though some great retro bookazines did eventually come out.

COVER STORY

The introduction of exclusive subscriber covers in 2018 was the result of a happy accident. While trying out concepts for *The Chaos Engine* in **RG** 180, we found that a design inspired by the box art looked fantastic, but didn't leave much room for the cover lines that are necessary on shop shelves. The solution was to give subscribers the cover we had, and create another one for retail. The experiment worked well, so we've been doing it ever since.



» You can see our point here, right? We didn't want to abandon the black cover.

DIVA DARRAN

"After the meeting room tables mysteriously vanished overnight, [cameraman and editor Matt] Deeble had to improvise [before a YouTube video]. He jury-rigged a 'table' from a pair of chairs, a kid's foosball table and a manky piece of MDF. We sat down, hit record, and Daz kept quietly looking down at Deeble's magnum opus, then suddenly left the room. "I can't do it," he said. "This table is ridiculous. I can't work under these conditions." I was left stunned, like a talk show host whose guest had spontaneously combusted." – Drew Sleep

» "It was like Christian Bale filming *Terminator Salvation* – but much more polite." – Drew

CONTRIBUTOR Q&A

SAM RIBBITS

ON DESIGNING RETRO GAMER

YOU CAME TO RETRO GAMER FROM LINUX USER, RIGHT?

Yeah, at the time I essentially wanted to change mags and be on – no disrespect to *Linux User* – a more creative mag. There was an issue before where I ended up helping a bit for Jonny because I think he maybe had some time off that issue. I got it because Jonny moved to *SciFiNow*.

HOW DID THE JOB ON RETRO GAMER COMPARE TO YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

I was expecting it to be more engaging and be more of a challenge, but I guess I wasn't expecting it to be quite as fun to work on as it is. I don't know, a lot of that was like obviously Darran, Nick, Luke and Drew as well, but compared to what I had been doing it was just worlds apart.

WHAT MEMORIES DO YOU HAVE OF OFFICE FUN?

Obviously a lot of the things like the score challenges we used to do, and working late sometimes – obviously working late doesn't sound like a thing to look forward to, but I don't know, it just… everyone got delirious.

ARE THERE ANY FEATURES OR COVERS THAT YOU HAVE PARTICULARLY FOND MEMORIES OF?

The *Croc* feature is one of them, because it was quite near the start of my time and as one of my favourite games it just felt perfect. The *Sonic 2* cover that we did won a cover award as well, I really like the *Daytona* cover and feature – there's so many.

WERE THERE ANY CHALLENGES OR THINGS YOU DIDN'T LIKE?

On some issues, we'd end up almost biting off more than we can chew and having to work late. As far as things like that, I don't think any of them we look back on afterwards and don't go "Wow, that did turn out really well," though.

FAVOURITE COVERS

The *Army Of Trolls* art on **RG** 200's cover is utterly fantastic, but **RG** 172's PC Engine cover and the *Out Run* cover of **RG** 156 are pretty great too.

"When it was looking bad, people called it 'Coffin Box' – your career's in the coffin if you work on that! People would say this to me and I'd say 'No, it's going to succeed' and then I'd drive home crying"

SEAMUS BLACKLEY ON THE CREATION OF THE XBOX (RG 174)

retro GAMER

GOING REMOTE

2020-2024

After the highs of issue 200 and a pretty good year in general, we were looking to the new decade with optimism. Within a matter of weeks, we were bidding each other farewell as we were given the order to work from home due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. We were told that the office would be closed for two weeks, and though none of us really believed that things would be over so soon, we did generally anticipate that we'd be back in the office one day.

Daily video calls kept the team well organised and connected during a stressful time, and production continued smoothly – albeit with some odd experiments like a puzzle page. That wasn't easy as replicating our working environments at home was tough for us all, and since I didn't have any kind of desk space in my tiny flat, my particularly dodgy setup was on my mum's kitchen table, using a 32-inch TV as a second monitor. At least it was only temporary, right?

After a couple of months, a bombshell announcement shattered that assumption. We were informed that since remote working was going so well, Future would be closing some of its smaller UK offices, one of which was our Bournemouth base. The next time we ventured into the office it would be to clear it out for good, and with social distancing and a cap on the number of people who could gather in the office, there would be no grand gathering or tearful hugs. It was certainly a strange way to end our time on Richmond Hill.

Still, at least we had certainty, and the magazine's future was anything but certain. For a brief time starting with issue 206, **Retro Gamer** came off the shelves and was available only to subscribers. Even when it returned we didn't know how changing habits and travel restrictions would impact our sales, but as you'll know, we're still here today. Thank you for your support during that time.

While the world may be open again, the changes we went through have proven to be permanent. We're never going back to the office – in fact, you could even go and live in it if you wanted as it's now been turned into a block of flats. We're firmly settled into our routine – we still do our daily video calls, but much of our communication takes place via Slack. Really, the only difference is that Tim Empey joined us as production editor in **RG** 215, as Drew moved on to make bookazines about *Pokémon* and craft beer.

Despite all the changes, making **Retro Gamer** is still a lot of fun. Interviewing developers will always be fascinating, a good chat about the latest films is never off the cards, and Darran's postal treats are as exciting as ever. Ultimately, we wake up in the morning and get to write about the games we love, and after all these years we still have the privilege of doing it on the printed page. There's nothing else we'd rather be doing.

» It took us a couple of working days to clear the office – these boxes are just Nick's ones!

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

» When you work from home, every day is 'Bring Your Cat To Work Day.'

OLD!
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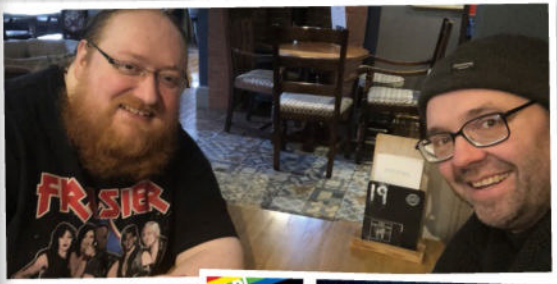
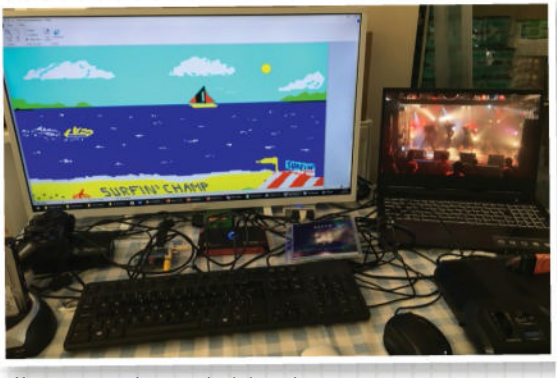
THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES
THE MAKING OF THE TERMINATOR
INSIDE THE FORGET ME KNOT
NIGHTDIVE STUDIOS
HIT & RUN
40 YEARS OF THE
ZX SPECTRUM
A YEAR-BY-YEAR ACCOUNT OF SIR CLIVE SINCLAIR'S SPECTACULAR 8-BIT HOME COMPUTER
THE EVOLUTION OF ECCO THE DOLPHIN
THE MAKING OF SHOGUN TOTAL WAR
ALSO INSIDE

» This Spectrum cover was one of our most popular in recent years, which was a really pleasant surprise.

» Darran finally managed to get that *Strider* cover in **RG** 217, as part of a Capcom celebration.



» We don't get to meet up in person as often as we used to, but it's always great to do so.



» You get a screenshot up on that baby, and you are seriously looking at that screenshot.

OLD!
retro GAMER
THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES
RESIDENT EVIL 4
DEVELOPERS REVEAL HOW CAPCOM'S ICONIC GAME CHANGED SURVIVAL HORROR FOREVER

» We've been around long enough to see *Resident Evil 4* go from brand new to retro. Here's to many more years.

REMEMBERING JASON KELK

The severity of the pandemic hit close to home when our regular Homebrew section writer Jason Kelk was hospitalised in March 2020, after becoming severely ill with COVID-19. Jason had a great fondness for 8-bit computers and was a well-loved figure in the Commodore 64 scene, thanks to his history as a programmer and artist on the computer. Jason passed away on 18 June 2021 – a great loss to his family and friends, and the community as a whole.

» Gone but not forgotten, we'll always be sure to remember Jason Kelk.

HEROIC FAILURE

In February 2020, before all the lockdowns kicked in, Nick ventured to London to be a guest on Sega's Twitch channel, to talk about *Virtua Fighter* as Kage-Maru was being added to its mobile puzzle game *Sega Heroes*. The stream with our former editor in chief Ryan King and Danny Russell was great fun, so of course the game's closure was announced just a couple of months later when Sega parted ways with developer Demiurge Studios.

» Nick promises to bring the KOs, with Danny in the middle and Ryan on the right.

LIFE IMITATES ART

Production of **RG** 206 started in the office and finished at home, and the issue included a feature on the history of the *Disaster Report* series. Although the games deal with earthquakes and floods rather than pandemics, it was certainly eerie to see the empty shelves in the in-game shops starting to be reflected in the real world, as people rushed to stock up on toilet paper and long-life foods as it became clear the first national lockdown was imminent.

» If nothing else, the dreadful situation revealed a degree of realism about Disaster Report.

THE LOST COVERS

Due to the fact that **RG** 206 and **RG** 207 never made it to shop shelves and were only sent to subscribers, all of the printed copies have the subscriber covers. Despite this Andy still designed regular retail covers as normal, which were used as the covers for digital editions of **Retro Gamer**. To date, these two are the only **Retro Gamer** covers that have been finished and released without actually seeing print.

CONTRIBUTOR Q&A

ANDY SALTER

IS IN THE HOT SEAT

YOU CAME TO RETRO GAMER IN 2019 – WERE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO GETTING BACK ON A GAMES MAGAZINE?

Yes, I had a short break on *Web Designer* after *games™* closed down and I'd been on *Web Designer* before, but I was quite pleased to get back onto a videogames mag.

DO YOU FIND THERE'S MUCH OF A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WORKING ON MODERN GAMING MAGAZINES AND RETRO GAMER?

It's a big difference. A large part of those magazines are sort of templated for previews and reviews. They also really relied more heavily on getting the new stuff in and the deadlines are quite tight, because obviously you've got to arrange access to these new games. With **Retro Gamer** it's not as big a problem – if we can't get someone to do an interview for a game we want to do one issue, it can go in the next issue, or it can go in an issue six months later.

IT'S PROBABLY EASIER TO GET ART FOR MODERN GAMES THOUGH, RIGHT?

The more recent the game is, the easier it is to get art, I find. But with some games it's not as important – the further back you go, the more you can get away with using pixel art. So the 8-bit games look quite good when you make them into big bits of art; even up to the PlayStation era is fairly good because it's got quite a stylistic sort of 3D.

DO YOU HAVE ANY FAVOURITE COVERS OR FEATURES?

I quite like the *Doom* cover, that was quite nice. I think my favourite one overall though is the *Street Fighter* Ryu pixel cover, the nice big bit of pixel art – it's also a really good subscriber cover. Also the *Sonic 3* cover, we really encapsulated the look of the box art, and I like the recent *Crash Bandicoot* one.

FAVOURITE FEATURES

Inside The Atari 2600 from **RG** 253, Graham Pembrey's excellent Evolution Of *Shadow Of The Beast* from **RG** 242 and **RG** 212's *Monkey Island* feature from Hareth Al Bustani, Konstantinos Dimopoulos and Darran really stood out in this era.

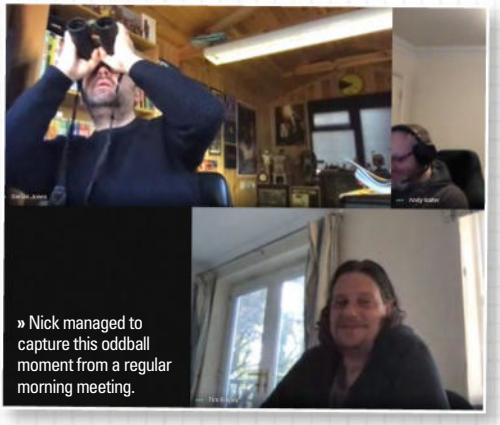
"The boss characters were originally going to eat hamburgers, but we were told not to treat McDonald's burgers with such disrespect"

MASATO MAEGAWA ON *MCDONALD'S TREASURE LAND ADVENTURE* (RG 219)

GOING LOO-PY

When we put *Micro Machines* on the cover of **RG** 228, we used the snooker table stage as the basis for the retail cover and the breakfast table for subscribers. However, we were quite surprised to see Darran's first concept for the cover – a photo of a bunch of toy cars on a toilet seat, inspired by the *Micro Machines 2* circuit Rim Runners. It was a funny thought, but we eventually decided against putting a loo on the cover.

» If we were being unkind, we'd call this a 'crap idea' – we're so funny.



» Nick managed to capture this oddball moment from a regular morning meeting.

TWITCH STREAMING

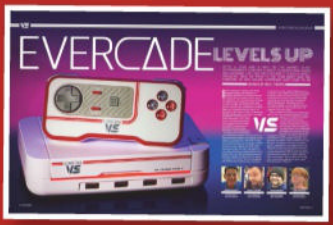
One of Darran's major hobbies outside of gaming is birdwatching. There weren't many opportunities to do that in the office, but once we started working from home, the view from his window proved to be a welcome alternative to watching other people typing. The Book Of Jibjob records that he exclaimed, "Hang on a minute guys, I've got an influx of tits" during a January 2021 video call, before whipping out a handy pair of binoculars to everyone else's amusement.

EMERGENCY TINKERING

During our recent review of the RetroTink 4K, there was a huge moment of panic when we thought we'd managed to completely brick the review unit – a $750 machine that we couldn't easily replace. There was a problem during the firmware update process and we couldn't resolve it, which was a huge problem as we hadn't yet taken screenshots. We'd almost given up when Darran had the idea to try a different SD card, which resolved the problem to our great relief.

HOME CONSOLE

When we did the Evercade VS cover for **RG** 226, we hadn't long left the last national lockdown and Future was rightly not approving business travel. However, we wanted to see the console in action before we put it on the cover, so an unusual compromise was agreed – Nick would host a work meeting at home, with a representative from Blaze travelling to demonstrate the console. Travel was back on the table for **RG** 239's Evercade EXP cover.



» Ironically, Nick had to ask his dad to pick up his own Evercade VS due to catching Covid-19.

CONTRIBUTOR Q&A

TIM EMPEY

ANSWERS OUR QUESTIONS

WHEN YOU JOINED RETRO GAMER, DID YOU HAVE A CHOICE OR WERE YOU JUST TOLD YOU WERE JOINING?

It was pretty much the second one there. I was on *All About History*, and that was a nightmare because you're just reading about people dying. Lots and lots of people die. It was like a monthly existential crisis. So I was actually really quite happy to get off it – and of course, it's **Retro Gamer**.

HAVE YOU FOUND THE BUSINESS HAS CHANGED MUCH?

It's a lot different. Thinking about back in the Highbury days, there were just so many games magazines and so many people, and pretty good camaraderie there. Obviously, that's all gone.

IT MUST BE WEIRD THAT RETRO GAMER NOW COVERS A FAIR AMOUNT OF STUFF THAT YOU WROTE ABOUT THE FIRST TIME AROUND IN CUBE AND PLAY...

I'm gonna be disappointed when Back To The Noughties surpasses my time at Imagine. I mean, that quote Nick dug up last issue. Was it about zombies? I don't really remember writing that. But it made me laugh so much.

HAS THERE BEEN ANYTHING UNEXPECTED ABOUT BEING ON RETRO GAMER?

Not really – I mean all subbing jobs are pretty much the same. But obviously the subject is important to me. I'm very lucky to be on two of our four remaining gaming magazines.

YOU JOINED US DURING THE WORK FROM HOME ERA – HOW DOES IT COMPARE TO BEING IN THE OFFICE?

The commute is amazing, but the trouble I've had with this place – the women upstairs would do their aerobics at 11 o'clock just as we're having meetings and various other people playing music. It would have been nice to have been on the team while we were still in office.

FAVOURITE COVERS

We loved Wil Overton's cover for **RG** 250 from the very first sketch. Andy particularly likes the **RG** 236 *Street Fighter* cover, and **RG** 219's *Gunstar Heroes* cover looks amazing.

"We launched the Rik Mayall TV commercials, we did this at The Ark in Hammersmith, and Sega brought along spotlight vans and shone Sega logos on the side of it"

MIKE HAYES ON THE FRIENDLY RIVALRY OF THE 16-BIT CONSOLE WAR (RG 205)

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HISTORY OF RETRO GAMER

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